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## Keith-Albee receiving new sound system among other improvements

By HANNA PENNINGTON The Herald-Dispatch [hpennington@hdmediallc.com](mailto:hpennington@hdmediallc.com)  
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Workers install a new projector at the Keith-Albee Performing Arts Center on Tuesday, Aug. 18, 2020, in downtown Huntington. Sholten Singer/The Herald-Dispatch

HUNTINGTON — While the doors of the historic Keith closed to the public amid the pandemic, the 92-year-old venue will welcome guests back when the time is right.

The downtown Huntington theater's surround-sound system will be upgraded and expanded, carpet is undergoing replacement to address safety and ADA-compliance issues and a new projector has been installed.

Co-president of the theater, West Virginia state Sen. Bob Plymale, D-Cabell, said the former sound and projector system was in place for over 14 years, and its replacement will not only take the place of the existing system but also provide an additional two speakers at the base of the stage.



Bob Plymale, co-president of the Keith-Albee Performing Arts Center, is pictured with a portion of the new cinema surround-sound system for the theater on Tuesday, Aug. 18, 2020, in Huntington.

Photos by Sholten Singer/The Herald-Dispatch

“This is a major upgrade to the whole system,” Plymale said. “Since we have been running the Keith-Albee, trying to restore it, this is one thing we have not done.”

Plymale said the upgrades will play a significant role in continuing the annual Marshall Artists Series events and providing new opportunities while keeping the theater's original Spanish-style architecture intact.

They were made possible by grant funding through the Artists Series as well as local dollars.

“What we're doing here is trying to modernize it with new sound and new things that could be better for students, youth and for the future,” he said. “The charm is here — we're just trying to make sure it's used more.”

The new carpet being installed throughout the Keith-Albee is a project Plymale said wouldn't have been possible had the theater been operational per usual over the past several months.

“The carpet installment — we wouldn't be able to do it for a long period of time,” he said. “We had to replace every carpet through the whole thing.”

Co-president David Tyson said the carpet replacement was not only done as part of the building's restoration, but also to address ongoing safety issues.

“Where the carpet was getting so tattered, somebody could trip and fall,” Tyson said. “The pattern is very similar, and when you walk you can feel the difference. It feels so much nicer, but it really was a safety issue, so we’re very relieved about that.”

The theater is preparing to welcome guests through its doors soon by following social distancing guidelines and minimizing capacity.



Renovations continue at the Keith-Albee Performing Arts Center on Tuesday, Aug. 18, 2020, in Huntington.  
Sholten Singer/The Herald-Dispatch

“The seats are marked off that cannot be used, and it’s roughly 600 seats out of 2,250,” Tyson said. “So, about 25%, following the guidelines.”

Much of the renovation will be complete this week, with just some areas of the carpeting remaining.

“This just shows what we can do — it’s a real jewel,” Tyson said. “It’s the centerpiece of this town.”

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Craig Hoerig, left, and Gary Cooper install a new projector at the Keith-Albee Performing Arts Center on Tuesday, Aug. 18, 2020, in downtown Huntington.

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