

## **PILLSBURY HOUSE THEATRE**

### **ACCESS STATEMENT AND PLAN**

#### **History:**

Pillsbury House Theatre is an integral part of Pillsbury United Communities (PUC), and, as such, adheres to the policies and practices set down by the larger organization.

Pillsbury United Communities conducted an assessment of all of its facilities in response to the 1990 passing of The Americans with Disabilities Act. At that time, Pillsbury House, the facility which would later house Pillsbury House Theatre, was found to meet the basic ADA requirements for architectural access.

Pillsbury United Communities has long had Equal Employment Opportunity Policies that include people with disabilities and continually works to create greater accessibility within its employments policies and practices. Pillsbury House Theatre is bound by and upholds all of the employment related policies established by PUC:

*It is the policy of the Agency to provide equal employment opportunities without regard to race, color, creed, religion, ancestry, membership in a local commission, age (40-over), marital status, affectional preference, disability, national origin, public assistance status, or gender except where such condition or status is a bonafide occupational qualification or any other basis provided by law. This policy applies to all phases of employment including, but not limited to, recruitment and advertisement, selection, promotion/upgrading, transfer, retirement, termination, rates of pay or other compensation, selection for training, and participation in all Agency sponsored employee activities.*

*The Agency will make reasonable accommodations for qualified individuals with known disabilities to the extent required by law. An employee who has a disability for which reasonable accommodation is needed should contact a supervisor to discuss the need for accommodation.*

*Employees with concerns about any type of discrimination in the workplace are encouraged to bring their concerns to the attention of their supervisors or the Agency's Affirmative Action Officers. (There are four trained Affirmative Action Officers currently on the PUC staff).*

*Employees can raise questions and concerns about their employment without fear of reprisal. Anyone found to be engaging in any type of unlawful discrimination or reprisal will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination.*

The mission of Pillsbury House Theatre – ***To create challenging theatre to inspire choice, change and connection*** – reflects an organizational commitment to making the arts accessible to the broadest population possible. For four years, a significant portion of Pillsbury House Theatre's programming was designed specifically for the participants of the Center for Services to the Developmentally Challenged. Up until 1998, Pillsbury House Theatre's specific policies and procedures with regard to accessibility had been mostly informal and unwritten. In September of 1998, Pillsbury House Theatre began the process of formally articulating its accessibility plans and practices separate from, but in accordance with, the policies of Pillsbury United Communities.

#### **Development of this plan:**

- I. The Co-Artistic Managing Director of Pillsbury House Theatre is the designated Access Coordinator and is also an Affirmative Action officer for Pillsbury United Communities.
- II. The Access Coordinator used materials from the MN State Arts Board, the National Endowment for the Arts, TCG and VSA Arts MN which deal specifically with accessibility in the performing arts to develop the initial plan.
- III. An Access Audit as compiled by the Metropolitan Regional Arts Council was conducted in 1998 as a diagnostic, and subsequent audits are performed each time a new strategic plan is created. The Access Plan is updated following each audit. The most recent Access Audit was performed with funding from VSA in 2011 by Shea Architects as part of the Pillsbury House + Theatre organizational transformation process. It was the most comprehensive Access Audit conducted in our history. Shea Architects examined the Pillsbury House facility and grounds and produced a report detailing level of compliance with ADA regulations of all spaces and recommendations for improvements. PH+T uses the Shea report as the basis for budgeting physical and capital improvements annually.

The initial and follow-up audits confirm that PHT employment and volunteer practices and the Pillsbury House architecture are reasonably accessible to people with disabilities. The area in which PHT needs to continually address accessibility is in the scope of its services and activities. We determined to start with the mainstage season and began creating and implementing strategies to make PHT mainstage shows known and accessible to people with disabilities. Resources to support these strategies were obtained through a capital campaign in 2000 and have been budgeted by production since 2001. The theatre now has accessible seating, owns equipment for Audio Description and provides ASL and Audio Described performances for each mainstage production as well as for Breaking Ice performances as requested. In 2012, in an effort to make increasing Access for people with disabilities a thread running through all organizational and program related decisions and plans (as we do with Undoing Racism and Creative Practice), we implemented a training for all PH+T staff in Universal Design and charged all staff with applying the principles of UD to their programs and activities. Julie Guidry of Upstream Arts provided the UD training as well as consultation and support for individual PH+T staff specific to their programs. In 2013, PHT Communications Director Alan Berks conducted two focus groups with theatre patrons with disabilities. The feedback gathered through these sessions immediately led to changes in our house management and communications practices. Upgrades to the PH+T website also came out of the focus groups and include a high contrast option and a specific 'Access Page'.

**Pillsbury House Theatre Organizational Accessibility Policy Statement:**

*In keeping with its mission of creating challenging theatre to inspire choice, change and connection, Pillsbury House Theatre is committed to making its programs and performances accessible to the broadest possible constituency and to specifically facilitating access by underserved populations. Pillsbury House Theatre does not discriminate on the basis of disability or access to, or treatment or employment in, its services, programs or activities. Upon request, reasonable accommodations will be provided to allow individuals with disabilities to participate in all of Pillsbury House Theatre's services, programs and activities.*

**Ongoing goals to maintain and increase accessibility:**

- I. Schedule sign language interpreted and audio described performances for every mainstage production and as requested for Breaking Ice performances and other arts events. Communicate accessibility options and services through multiple media well in advance of scheduled events. Develop and implement enhancement activities to deepen and expand the experience of attending events and performances for patrons with disabilities. **Ongoing**
- II. Build and maintain relationships with individuals and organizations connected to disabled communities to promote PHT accessible programming and to advise PHT about improving and increasing accessibility. **Ongoing**

Currently the PHT Advisory Board includes a member who worked for 22 years as the Associate Director of Wilderness Inquiry (WI), WI is an organization that provides outdoor experiences to people of all abilities. Upstream Arts, serving people with disabilities, offices at Pillsbury House and regularly implements disability related trainings that are available to all PHT staff. Upstream is part of the Creative Community Development (CCD) Leadership Team and has helped embed access actions in strategies in all of the PH+T led CCD work. Focus groups of 24 individuals with a range of disabilities provided valuable feedback about PHT programs and services and helped us establish new relationships with individuals with disabilities as well as trusted ASL and AD providers. For example, a group of People of Color with MS now regularly attend PHT performances. PH+T employs a number of staff and artists who experience a range of disabilities and who provide ongoing input about accessibility concerns. One staff person who joined PH+T in 2016 is an elder with low vision, she has helped make overall visual communications as well as the PH+T public computer lab more accessible to people with vision impairments.

- III. Update Access Audits with every strategic planning process. **Access Audit completed by Ryan Kronzer and Jim Ruckle of Shea Architects, Inc. (2011) as part of Pillsbury House + Theatre organizational transformation process.**

Improvements to the PHT facility resulting from the 2011 audit include:

- Automatic doors that open with a switch in the main entrance..
- Redrawing the disabled parking spaces in the parking lot. And adding van accessible signage.
- Repairing the elevator leading to the stage, including adding a working phone line. **(the elevator stopped working again in 2016 and is a priority for raising capital funds to replace it – working toward an early 2018 deadline)**
- Repositioning of furniture and equipment in PHT public and program spaces to allow for better navigation by people with disabilities as well as elders and people with young children.

- IV. Embed principles of Universal Design in all PHT programs and activities. **UD trainings for all staff conducted in 2012 by Julie Guidry and Bree Seiplinga of Upstream Arts. PHT program and organizational plans were updated 2012-2013 to include strategies to increase accessibility. Ongoing**
- V. Include accessibility in the upgrading of the PHT website and electronic communications tools. **Website improvements phase one completed, next phase underway and ongoing.**
- VI. Update safety and evacuation procedures and train all staff annually. **Ongoing**