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### Contractors creating a scene behind the scenes with theater renovation

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TAMPA -- A \$250,000 renovation of the Tampa Theatre's backstage areas, which are rarely seen by people who buy tickets for movies and concerts, will get national exposure on a cable **television program** early next year.

**DIY Network** will videotape the project's progress in the coming week for broadcast sometime next spring. The network's producers are working with The Beck Group, which is coordinating renovations and volunteering its services along with several other local contractors.

The renovations, which are said to be long overdue in attracting performers to the downtown entertainment venue, will be featured on "DIY to the Rescue" in two half-hour segments. The **program** focuses on home improvements but occasionally takes on commercial renovation projects.

That's where the Tampa Theatre -- a 1926 downtown landmark that had been marked for demolition before the City of Tampa bought it in 1976 -- comes into play.

Besides being a favorite of film enthusiasts nationwide, the theater is recognized among architecture buffs as an original design of John Ebersson, who created other movie palaces around the country during the early 20th century.

"It's an untouched treasure of Tampa," said Beth Bernitt, director of integrated services with Beck's Tampa office who also chairs the Tampa Theatre Foundation. "This is a quiet facility that needed some tender loving care."

A proactive effort

The Tampa Theatre Restoration Society contacted DIY last year seeking help. In October, a network crew toured the building and chose to feature the work being done, literally, behind the scenes.

"The theater itself is gorgeous, but the dressing rooms needed help," said **Gary McCormick**, director of public relations with DIY, operated by **Scripps Networks Inc.** in Knoxville, Tenn. The challenge was to modernize the facilities without straying from the original design, he said.

Beck, which took over the project three weeks ago, rallied other contracting partners to step in and provide labor and materials valued at \$250,000, Bernitt said. Those involved in the project include Urban Studio Architects, Borrell Electric Co., Southern Equipment Corp. and Southern Plains Painting.

While the theater's marquee, lobby and 1,446-seat auditorium have been restored over the past few years, its backstage areas was largely overlooked, though not by performers who more often stayed in their tour buses rather than use the outmoded dressing rooms.

"You might not think it makes a difference, but word gets around," said John Bell, the theater's president and CEO. "It won't hurt to have nicer facilities."

Greening up the 'green room'

Backstage renovations include outfitting the theater's two star's dressing rooms, located directly below Polk Street, with new acoustical ceiling tiles and ceramic tile flooring, along with new mirrors, lighting and bathroom fixtures.

A 200-square-foot "green room" is also being created from a former street-level storage area along Florida Avenue, complete with a wet bar, window seats and a TV monitor that will let performers look in on audiences before **shows**. Display boards advertising upcoming performances and events will be used to cover the theater's original windows.

Although the Tampa Theatre has had great success attracting big-name performers, Bell said the renovations should bring those that might otherwise choose newer venues such as the Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center or Clearwater's Ruth Eckerd Hall.

The members of Rockapella, the five-man singing group from New York, will be the first to enjoy the renovations when they come in for a Dec. 22 holiday performance. Future performers booked at the theater include guitarist Derek Trucks, pianist Marcia Ball and vocalist Madeleine Peyroux.

Additional renovations to the 80-year-old theater will be considered over the next two to three decades as funding sources are identified, Bell said.

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