

**Center Stage in Evergreen**  
**2021 Jefferson County Historic Landmark**  
**By Richard Scudder**



Just above the sparkling waters of Bear Creek in Evergreen sits Center Stage. As a part of the Historic Evergreen Conference Center, Center Stage has had this view of Bear Creek Canyon since 1924. Center Stage is part of a registered National Historic District located within a three-block area at the edge of town. The Evergreen Conference Complex, part of this district, includes twenty-three structures. The entire district is surrounded by meadows, rocks, and heavily wooded mountains much as it was when it

served as a music camp about 1900.



*Evergreen Conference with Meeting House on Right*

The historic boundaries that comprise the music camp itself, the old mission, and the properties of the Sisters of St. Mary, all made up the Music Conference Complex. The Meeting House, now known as Center Stage, was built in 1924 by local carpenter and stone mason John Spence as a part

of the Evergreen Conference Center, and its construction and architectural features reflect the construction and appearance of Evergreen more than a century ago. The main room had a high ceiling and a performance stage with steps on three sides.

The Meeting House was a part of the summer camps built by the Episcopal Church; it featured music and church services. The land was donated by Mary Neosho Williams and her son-in-law, Canon Winfred Douglas. Canon Douglas became an internationally known expert on the plain-song mass, and the emphasis on music became a key feature of the Conference Center. The summer camps became very popular in the early twentieth century and included a six-week summer school on liturgical music.

Generations have acted and sung together on Center Stage. Tom Scripps and his family are a great example of that. He joined the Evergreen Chorale when it began in 1971 and met his wife in a musical production at Center Stage. He also remembers when he, his wife and their three children all sang together at Center Stage in a musical. "It sure saved on baby-sitting expenses; but, more importantly, it was a wonderful family experience," Scripps stated.

Ovation West Performing Arts is the owner of Center Stage. The organization grew out of Evergreen Chorale. As the Chorale added other activities, such as Summer Music Camp and managing Center Stage as a community resource, the name was changed to reflect a new larger mission.



Amy Bergevin talked about how Ovation West and Center Stage are sewn into the community fabric. Over the decades, Center Stage has collected the costumes created by the members of the community for the many plays and musicals presented. Those costumes crowd the storage area of the old building, but they are a treasure for not just Center Stage but the Denver theater community as well. They are loaned out free to other organizations

frantically casting about for period costumes for their school or community theater production. Whether is exactly the right wedding dress, a top hat, a flapper costume, or more recently, an antique wheelchair exactly like FDR used to have, Center Stage and Ovation West have been there to help the community,



Christine Emery, Managing Director of Ovation West, talked about how Ovation West is committed to maintaining Center Stage for the benefit of the community. In addition to

Ovation West, the Evergreen Players, Evergreen Children’s Chorale, Mountain Youth Musicals and many guest organizations call Center Stage home. The lobby, including the Rotary Club Art Gallery, is a satellite gallery for the artists of the Center for the Arts Evergreen. A parent-child music education class and Spanish language class for adults meet weekly in the lobby. Since 1990, Ovation West has invested over \$1.3 million in the property, transforming a rustic summer pavilion into a comfortable theater. In 2018, a new sound system was installed that benefits all users and patrons. In the summer of 2019, the lobby was renovated with funds raised through a community effort.

This year, Ovation West will celebrate its 50<sup>th</sup> year of operation with a series of performances of *Fiddler on the Roof* at Center Stage.

Over the years, the Meeting House, now Center Stage, has become a beloved fixture in Evergreen. Generations of children have grown up performing in summer camp musicals and



then moved on to become actors and singers, entertaining their community from the same stage. Three generations of the Dunn Family continue to participate in concerts and musicals, with granddaughter Katrina Glaser having a lead role in this year’s production of *Fiddler on the Roof*. Her grandmother, JoAnn Dunn, is a guest author of the Medlen School article in this

publication. The Meeting House has continued the focus on music and community as envisioned by its early founders. The Jefferson County Historical Commission is proud to award Center Stage Historic Landmark Status.

#### Sources

National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form PHO678139, The Evergreen Conference Complex, [Npgallery.nps.gov](https://www.nps.gov/npgallery)

City and Mountain Views, “Jefferson County Neighborhoods”, [citymtnviews.com](http://citymtnviews.com)

Interviews on May 5th, 2021 with Ovation West Performing Arts Managing Director Christine Emery, Treasurer Amy Bergevin, and Historian Tom Scripps.