



For Immediate Release

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Near West Theatre Selects Mike Obertacz as Managing Director
*Will succeed founder Stephanie Morrison Hrbek as 40th season begins at
community-based theater in Gordon Square Arts District*

CLEVELAND, Ohio (September 28, 2017) – Near West Theatre announced today that it has hired Mike Obertacz to fulfill the role of Managing Director to succeed founder and executive director, Stephanie Morrison Hrbek. Obertacz will begin his tenure on October 11, 2017 as the theatre commences its 40th season. He will lead Near West Theatre in partnership with Bob Navis, Jr., who will continue in his role as Artistic Director. Obertacz and Navis will carry forward the theatre’s mission to offer theatre arts experiences that are inclusive and transformational for performers and audiences alike.

“I look forward to carrying forward Near West Theatre founder Stephanie Morrison Hrbek’s outstanding leadership. Her legacy includes growing Near West Theatre from a summer youth program housed in rented space for over 35 years to today’s new, accessible theatre anchoring the Gordon Square Arts District,” said Mike Obertacz, the new Managing Director of Near West Theatre. “This immense responsibility perfectly aligns my passions and experiences with youth development, arts and education, social service, nonprofit leadership, and of course, musical theatre, an art form I credit with my own personal and professional growth. It has been my lifetime dream to manage a theater and, specifically, a theater that has such a profound impact on the youth, families and community it serves.”

Obertacz previously served as Director of Programs for the Center for Arts-Inspired Learning (CAL), where he managed a staff of 10 and provided oversight to a roster of over 75 teaching artists. At CAL, he developed a strategic shift in how the organization developed and deployed capacity through a Resident Teaching Artist Initiative that added professional teaching artists to full-time staff positions. He was also instrumental in helping CAL increase new contributed support and raise earned revenues by more than 50% over the last three years. He also led the creation of a formalized professional development series for artists that resulted in new and innovative residencies that better serve and engage Greater Cleveland students through STEM, ELA, and Social-Emotional Learning integrated programs.

Prior to his role with CAL, Obertacz served as Director of Programs with Career Gear, a social service nonprofit agency providing holistic services to better prepare formerly homeless, incarcerated, and chronically unemployed men to re-enter the workforce and support their families. At Career Gear, Obertacz managed the staff and day-to-day operations while conceiving and implementing a strategic shift in focus that moved the organization from simply providing attire to adding professional development, mentoring, and professional networking. During his time at Career Gear, he dramatically grew the census of men served averaging more than 1,200 men a year through a suiting and referral program and 250 participants annually through long-term services.

Obertacz earned his Bachelor of Science in Education from Bowling Green State University, spent a decade as a professional actor performing in over 45 productions nationally, and then dedicated the last ten years to leading and directing programming for nonprofit organizations in Cleveland and New York City. Mr. Obertacz received youth development training through the MyCom Youth Work Institute at Case Western Reserve University. He was designated a 2008 United Way Junior Fellow through Baruch College in New York City, and is a recent alumnus of the Civic Leadership Institute through The Cleveland Leadership Center – where he now serves on the Alumni Advisory Committee. Obertacz also serves on the Education Committee of the Cleveland Museum of Art and has recently been invited to serve on the City of Shaker Heights’ Public Art Committee. He resides in Shaker Heights with his wife and two sons.

“We are all thrilled that our search resulted in the hiring of such an outstanding person. Mike Obertacz brings an incredible depth of expertise, life experience, and knowledge of theater, as well as a lifetime commitment to social justice,” commented Board President Jason Bristol. “We are now poised for our 40th season with a plethora of opportunities to promote our new Managing Director and to usher in a new era for our organization.”

Bristol also praised founder Morrison Hrbek for her enduring vision and leadership over the past four decades. “On behalf of the board and all who have been involved with Near West Theatre, I would like to thank Stephanie for the vision, talent, drive, and passion she has brought to this organization and the community,” he said. “Her work and the programs of Near West Theatre have provided opportunity for and transformed the lives of so many children and adults in Cleveland. I am grateful she will continue to be involved with the theatre in a new capacity.”

Morrison Hrbek has agreed to continue in a part-time role to partner with Obertacz on a forthcoming endowment campaign that will position the theatre for long-term sustainability. “I am excited to see where Mike takes Near West Theatre, and how he builds on the almost 40 years of our artistic and social justice mission,” said Morrison Hrbek. “I look forward to continuing to move in and among the generations of alumni who populate our community and whose relatives are now getting engaged at Near West Theatre. This longevity of involvement is a testimony to the power of the performing arts to heal, bind, and create community. I cannot wait to see what comes forth over the next 40 years!”

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Near West Theatre is an intergenerational, professionally directed and designed community-based theatre in the Gordon Square Arts District in Cleveland, Ohio. Founded in 1978, Near West Theatre’s mission is to build loving relationships and engage diverse people in strengthening their sense of identity, passion, and purpose, individually and in community, through transformational theatre arts experiences. For more information, visit nearwesttheatre.org.