

VIDEO: Civic center arts expansion spans 2 counties, one river

Mid-Hudson Civic Center President Paul Lloyd talks about the Sugar Loaf Performing Arts Center. John W. Barry/Poughkeepsie Journal

John W. Barry, Poughkeepsie Journal 9:42 p.m. EDT June 3, 2015

The Mid-Hudson Civic Center announced in May 2014 that it would take over the Sugar Loaf Performing Arts Center. The first shows were staged in September. And the purchase was finalized in January.



(Photo: Amanda Purcell/
Poughkeepsie Journal)

Lights illuminated the stage.

The sound of [country music star Lee Brice](http://www.poughkeepsiejournal.com/story/news/local/2015/05/13/lee-brice-civic-center/27236327/) (/story/news/local/2015/05/13/lee-brice-civic-center/27236327/)’s voice filled the Mid-Hudson Civic Center.

And thousands in the audience, song after song, threw their hands triumphantly in the air.

They sang along. They danced. And for a few hours on May 15 they turned downtown Poughkeepsie into a popular culture inferno, Southern style.

The [Lee Brice](http://www.poughkeepsiejournal.com/story/news/local/2015/05/13/lee-brice-civic-center/27236327/) show was Town of Poughkeepsie resident Tina Kwant’s second concert at the civic center. She thinks it’s a well-run facility and likes that it’s close to home, where she is raising five children.

Asked what she likes best about the civic center, she said, "It’s local."

The Mid-Hudson Civic Center has been an anchor of downtown Poughkeepsie for four decades. And it’s undergoing a transition.

But repairs are needed, according to president Paul Lloyd. At the same time, the civic center is expanding its reach. To increase revenue, diversify offerings and expand entertainment, [the civic center has purchased a theater in Orange County — the Sugar Loaf Performing Arts Center](http://www.poughkeepsiejournal.com/story/news/local/2014/05/15/mid-hudson-civic-center-sugar-loaf/9123961/) (/story/news/local/2014/05/15/mid-hudson-civic-center-sugar-loaf/9123961/), which sits about an hour’s drive from Poughkeepsie.

The two venues offer sharp contrast. The capacity of the civic center — an open hall — is 3,000 for general admission, with seating up to 2,700. Sugar Loaf’s theater can hold 688. An upstairs pavilion has a capacity of 250.

Sugar Loaf, Lloyd said, "gives us the flexibility to entertain different size shows that we couldn’t have in the past. Shows that didn’t make sense at the civic center now make sense at Sugar Loaf."

Similarly, the [Bardavon 1869 Opera House](http://www.poughkeepsiejournal.com/story/news/local/2014/05/15/mid-hudson-civic-center-sugar-loaf/9123961/) in Poughkeepsie took over the Broadway Theater at [Ulster Performing Arts Center](http://www.poughkeepsiejournal.com/story/news/local/2014/05/15/mid-hudson-civic-center-sugar-loaf/9123961/) in Kingston in 2006. Bardavon Executive Director Chris Silva said the 1,500-seat UPAC allowed him to expand the number and types of performances he could host, beyond

the 944-seat Bardavon.

Regardless of the venue, more shows mean more revenue. And as with the civic center's Ice Time Sports Complex in Newburgh, revenue generated by Sugar Loaf can be used to pay for upgrades and repairs to the civic center. These, according to Lloyd, include:

- A new roof, which is likely to cost \$600,000
- A new front marquee costing \$60,000. A new marquee in the rear of the civic center, facing the arterial, would cost \$38,000.
- The plaza walkway in front of the civic center is likely to cost \$50,000.
- A \$40,000 paint job.

Lloyd would also like to install solar panels on the civic center, once a new roof is installed.

"The civic center has done an admirable job just keeping its lights on for 40 years," Lloyd said. "But there's not enough money for capital improvements."

The civic center announced in May 2014 that it would take over Sugar Loaf. The first shows were staged in September. And the purchase was finalized in January. The civic center, under Lloyd's guidance, re-opened a venue that had failed financially and closed.

The move, made possible with an \$800,000 mortgage that also covered renovations at Sugar Loaf, is part of a regional trend in which Poughkeepsie-based arts organizations have expanded across county and state lines. Such an approach, says one regional expert, is critical for the cultivation and survival of the arts, which help define the Hudson Valley's identity on multiple levels.

Collaboration, expansion and consolidation, according to a 2014 study, help arts groups expand their base and cultural offerings, nurture larger audiences and draw from a larger source of funding. At stake across the region for those who stage the arts, their audience members and the taxpayers who support the arts are a half-billion dollars in economic impact and thousands of jobs. The Mid-Hudson Civic Center alone generates an annual economic impact of more than \$12 million.

Janis Benincasa, assistant director of the Center for Research, Regional Education and Outreach at the [State University of New York at New Paltz](#), which conducted the study, said the civic center's consolidation of Sugar Loaf's operations is a pivotal move.

"The perception in the region is that there has to be less of a sense of competition and more of a sense of collaboration," she said. "If that includes consolidation to create a healthy arts and cultural environment, then it's a good thing when it happens."

Benincasa said steps like the civic center's purchase of Sugar Loaf can help reshape the identity of the Hudson Valley, far beyond the arts.

"We are a region that spans a river," she said. "Where the river brings us together as a region, defines us a region, it also divides us. I can't say enough about crossing that river."

The civic center's expansion of its Orange County footprint follows a similar step by Arts Mid-Hudson, a regional arts organization based in Poughkeepsie. In 2014, [Arts Mid-Hudson, in addition to distributing state funding for the arts in Dutchess and Ulster counties, took on the same task in Orange County \(/story/news/2015/04/29/arts-mid-hudson-funding/26605275/\).](#)

Arts Mid-Hudson President Linda Marston-Reid noted the crowds that the civic center often brings to Poughkeepsie and how a line of people waiting to get in can sometimes stretch from the venue's front entrance, south toward Main Street, then west down Main Street. Marston-Reid said she has on more than one occasion chatted with those waiting in line and was interested to learn that many of them come from outside of [Dutchess County](#).

Marston-Reid lauded the civic center for bringing "an external crowd" into Poughkeepsie. And, she said, by building on a foundation laid in Poughkeepsie, Lloyd, by taking over Sugar Loaf, "Raises the brand of the civic center."

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Arts and the Economy

According to a 2014 study by the Center for Research, Regional Education and Outreach at the State University of New York at New Paltz, the arts across Dutchess, Orange, Putnam, Rockland, Sullivan, Ulster and Westchester counties generate nearly a half-billion dollars in economic activity and are linked to 4,970 jobs.

Also, audience spending on lodging, food, recreation, retail and transportation accounted for \$498 million injected directly into the region's economy. The value of volunteer labor accounted for another \$28.7 million.

Mid-Hudson Civic Center

Location: 14 Civic Center Plaza, Poughkeepsie. Operations include McCann Ice Arena in Poughkeepsie and the Ice Time Sports Complex in Newburgh. The civic center hosts live music and entertainment, trade shows, community events and during emergencies, serves as an [American Red Cross](#) shelter.

President: Paul Lloyd

Capacity: General admission: 3,000. Seating: up to 2,600.

Attendance: 200,000 annually at the civic center and McCann Ice Arena.

Economic impact: More than \$12 million

Also: The civic center does not receive public funding.

Past Performances: [Bob Dylan](#), [Bruce Springsteen](#), [Bob Marley](#), [Billy Joel](#), [Frankie Valli](#), [Bob Weir](#) of the [Grateful Dead](#).

Sugar Loaf Performing Arts Center

Address: 1351 Kings Highway, Chester, Orange County.

Information: Call: 845-610-5900 or visit www.sugarloafpac.org.

Capacity: Theater: 688. Upstairs pavilion: 250.

Upcoming performances:

- June 4: 10-4 Comedy Tour
- June 13: Monster Intelligence
- June 26: Big Apple Circus
- June 27: Comedian [Vic Dibitto](#)
- June 28: [Los Lonely Boys](#)
- July 5: [Chasin' Crazy](#)
- July 8: [Pink Martini](#)

From Poughkeepsie to Sugar Loaf

Mid-Hudson Civic Center President Paul Lloyd first heard of the Sugar Loaf Performing Arts Center in spring of 2013.

A colleague in the music business wanted to stage a concert, but the civic center was too big, Lloyd said. His colleague suggested Sugar Loaf, but it didn't work out.

Lloyd 'liked' Sugar Loaf on Facebook and learned in the fall of 2013 that they were closing. That December, he needed lights for a television shoot of a wrestling event at the civic center and he secured some gear from a company in Orange County.

The owner of that company had built Sugar Loaf and after an inquiry from Lloyd, told him the nonprofit organization that had taken over the theater had run out of money. Lloyd contacted the organization and learned that the building was headed for foreclosure. He also found out that the group was looking for a partner.

Discussions began in January 2014 and that May, Lloyd and the civic center announced they would be purchasing the Sugar Loaf Performing Arts Center.

"We're not flush with money to go and buy anything," Lloyd said. "But because the value was so high and the money owed on it was low...we were able to get a loan."

Since August, the civic center has staged more than 30 events at Sugar Loaf that have showcased opera, orchestral music, ballet, rock and more.

The backbone of the operation, Lloyd said, is the Sugar Loaf Performing Arts Academy. It started out with 20 kids and in the fall will welcome 86 children. It will also be expanded to include a dance academy, with future plans for a youth orchestra.

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