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Berthold Ringeisen

• JANUARY 29, 2008

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We don't know what the Village of Tarrytown would be like today if the historic Tarrytown Music Hall, the oldest operating theater in Westchester County, had been razed and turned into a parking lot back in 1980, as was planned before Berthold and Helen Ringeisen stepped in. We're glad we don't know, because the Music Hall, which draws audiences of nearly 80,000 a year, is more than a theater and concert space, it is a life force on Main Street and part of what makes Tarrytown the vibrant village that it is.

Berthold Ringeisen was remembered in a memorial this weekend as the savior of the Music Hall. He passed away Dec. 30 at the age of 75.



Berthold F. Ringeisen

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The 1885 theater had been shuttered and deteriorating since 1976 - the victim of a new enthusiasm for small, featureless multiplexes - when the Ringeisens risked their home and their life savings to save it from the wrecking ball, Journal News staff writer Gerald McKinstry noted in a story on Saturday. They operated as a non-profit, secured grants for major renovations and sweated the details, doing repairs, maintenance and restoration work themselves and renting out the facility to cover costs.

Somehow, they made the old building work, which is worth remembering in this age of tear-downs. The Music Hall now features entertainments including, film, dance, rock and roll, and children's theater, to name just a few.

Ringeisen emigrated from Germany to study at Yale University but it was an offer of a job at The Hackley School that brought him to Tarrytown. He

became a professor at Marymount College, where he taught humanities and languages for 45 years, retiring as professor emeritus when the college closed in 2007.

Bjorn Olsson, who was hired as executive director of the Music Hall in 2003, summed up Ringeisen's impact: "It was basically weeks away from being torn down," Olsson said. "He really, truly made a difference for this community and for Westchester. He showed one person can make a difference."

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