



## New Meaning for a Church in Portland

### Description

Thanks to a group of dedicated expat Virginians and a team from SERA Architects, an abandoned church in [Portland](#), Ore. now lives a new life – as a theater and community center.

The Virginians purchased it and started producing plays there in 2008. By 2010, they'd developed a marketing plan and begun reaching out to the community.

"They saw the church as a beautiful old building from about 1900," says Molly Culbertson, an architect at SERA. "And they wanted to develop a community space too."

In 2015, the architects were brought in to work on the playhouse, pro bono. "First was the renovation of the basement – there were no dressing rooms with adequate lighting," she says.

A capital campaign – followed by overwhelming community response – enabled more renovations for other spaces. Pro bono was no longer the case, and much was to be done.

"There were issues with the bathrooms for intermission, because they needed to accommodate 90-plus people," she says. "They wanted them to be non-gender specific, so we had to navigate around the code for non-gender specific bathrooms."

Then there was the lobby, the reception area and space for the community itself, with a rehearsal studio to boot – in a new structure. "It was in a residential neighborhood so it has a modern residential feel," she says.

"There's a multipurpose space in front – they have plays, rehearsals, auditions, and classes there, and there are hardwood floors so it's outfitted for the performing arts," she says. "And I just went to a blood drive there – it's for any kind of event you want to hold."

It all wrapped up this year – a community project borne from a church no longer use, a group in search of a theater, and a community looking to define itself.

This may be urban design at its finest.

For more, go [here](#).

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Photos by Pete Eckert

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mike

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