**Bergen Performing Arts Center (bergenPAC) Formally Announces $15M Capital Campaign, *“Invest In The Arts”*to Continue the Legacy of World-Class Entertainment and Arts Education In New Jersey**

**bergenPAC's Capital Campaign is a Public-Private Partnership with Bergen County, Private Donors, Small Businesses, Corporations, and Foundations Supporting the Renovation, Restoration, and Arts Education Programs within the Community**

(Englewood, NJ, March 15, 2022) -- Bergen Performing Arts Center, one of the most beautiful and architecturally relevant theaters in New Jersey, announced a $15 million public-private partnership capital campaign during a groundbreaking ceremony held today at the venue. The capital campaign, with $4 million already raised during a silent phase, will support the renovation and restoration of the beloved and historic theater, as well as an expansion of its arts education programs.

In addition to the $4 million raised through the generosity of key stakeholders from New Jersey’s philanthropic and cultural community of donors, businesses, corporations, and foundations during the silent phase of the capital campaign, the County of Bergen has initiated the funding of $6 million, helping bergenPAC reach a remarkable $10 million toward its overall goal of $15 million. At the groundbreaking event, the bergenPAC Board of Trustees unveiled its ambitious follow-up public-private partnership campaign to secure the additional $5 million in capital. Further, bergenPAC announced that its “Invest In the Arts” campaign has entered its public phase, and invited all members of the community to join the campaign and become a part of this transformational legacy that is inspiring young performers and thrilling theater patrons.

Frank Huttle, III who founded bergenPAC in 2003, says, “We are elated that bergenPAC is poised to bring entertainment to more people in the community with a renovated state-of-the-art theater, featuring enhanced technology and sound taking us into the future along with the expansion of arts education programs that take place at our Performing Arts School and in New Jersey’s Public Schools. The county has marshaled its considerable governmental powers in support of our theater and the educational programs, and we couldn’t be more grateful.”

Robert Cook, bergenPAC Chairman and Founding Trustee, says, “bergenPAC is a vital and ever-evolving institution within the community. I am delighted that, through this capital campaign, we can make good on our commitment to provide top-quality arts programming and arts education as a vital resource for the general public. It means the world to our students as well as to everyone who benefits from our programs and steps through the doors of our theater.”

Among the speakers at today’s groundbreaking ceremony were U.S. Congressman Josh Gottheimer (NJ-5); Bob Cook, bergenPAC Chairman of the Board of Trustees; Frank Huttle III, Founder of bergenPAC; and Darlene Love, Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductee and frequent bergenPAC performer. Vince Ermita, an 11-year-old Bergen Performing Arts student who is currently playing Young Simba in the Disney Broadway musical, *The Lion King*, kicked off the event with a special performance.

The venerable 1,367-seat theater, which originally opened 1926 as a vaudeville and movie theater, is one of the few such buildings still operating in the United States as an entertainment venue. The intent of the renovation and restoration plan is to retain the venue’s original décor and design, with enhancements and reconstruction meant to take bergenPAC into the future. The architect company is DMR, and construction will be led by Ray Reduce Development. The renovations and upgrades revealed during the groundbreaking ceremony will be carried out by a local union workforce.

The $15M campaign will continue the legacy of providing world-class entertainment and expanding the already lauded Performing Arts School recognized for training pre-professionals. One former student performer, Rachel Zegler, starred as Maria in Steven Spielberg's acclaimed big-screen version of the musical, *West Side Story*, which received seven Academy Award Nominations and earned Zegler a Golden Globe for Best Actress. NBC's recent *Annie Live!* featured students Felice Kakaletris and Sophie Knapp, as orphans Molly and Judy. Kakaletris and Knapp continue to participate in the Young Professionals Vocal Academy at bergenPAC.

With the additional funding bergenPAC can expand two critical arts education programs. The Special Needs program "Voices in Harmony" is a partnership with N.J. public schools for students and young adults with special needs where students work together and participate in residencies focused on hip hop, music, dance, and theater.

The Performing Arts School has a track record of partnering with over 140 N.J. public, private, and independent schools, bolstering their existing arts programs and benefiting 15,000 students with workshops, masterclasses, residencies, assemblies, and co-theater presentations. Co-productions result in musicals led by a team of professional directors, choreographers, sound techs, and more, provided by bergenPAC. The Performing Arts School also produces assembly programs teaching real-life issues, including anti-bullying, drug abuse awareness, health and nutrition, diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.

"It is our mission to change lives through music and it’s our belief that music belongs to the community,” said Robert Cook. “We are committed to continually engage, support and learn from our diverse community, with the goal of enhancing our facilities and programs for years to come.”

The renovations and restorations at bergenPAC will take place now until the Fall of 2022, but the show must – and will – go on. bergenPAC, throughout the spring and summer, will produce a Broadway series and several kids’ shows that will be held indoors at Westfield Garden State Plaza. And, already, new concerts are being scheduled for bergenPAC’s reopening. bergenPAC is proud to announce Darlene Love’s Annual Holiday show (Dec.9) R&B superstar group Dru Hill (Oct. 8) and hilarious comedian Anthony Rodia (Nov.25.)

Please Invest In the Arts by supporting bergenPAC’s Capital Campaign and to stay up to date for new show announcements, visit www.bergenPAC.org.

Among the planned upgrades are:

* New LED marquee
* New theater seats, carpeting, and stage
* Refurbishment of the theater's interior ornamental elements
* Enhancement of the theater's state-of-the-art sound system and the addition of acoustic sidewall curtains
* Additional mezzanine-level bathrooms
* Expanded lobby and bars
* Redesigned and ADA-compliant box office windows
* Improvements to The Performing Arts School at bergenPAC's dance and       recording studios
* Enhanced bergenPAC membership programs, with exclusive amenities, for new and existing patrons
* Premier show lighting system to meet today's industry standards
* Superior audio/video system and upgraded technology throughout the whole theater

**About Bergen Performing Arts Center (bergenPAC)** Founded in 2003, the 1,367-seat Bergen Performing Arts Center, or bergenPAC, is the area's cultural mecca. The theater’s legacy started in 1926 when it opened as the Englewood Plaza movie theater. United Artists purchased the building in 1967 and kept the doors open until 1973. Through the efforts of a group of local citizens under the leadership of John Harms, the John Harms Center came to life in 1976. In 2003, a small group of dedicated individuals led by Frank Huttle III helped preserve this special theater and rechristened it the Bergen Performing Arts Center. The historic Art Deco-style theater boasts one of the finest acoustic halls in the United States, attracting a stellar roster of world-class entertainment. The jewel in our crown is The Performing Arts School at bergenPAC – the innovative, educational performing arts initiative that, through programs, classes, outreach, school shows, and main theater presented shows, reaches more than 30,000 students and community youth annually. The Performing Arts School provides community youth, age 2 months to 21 years, with unique, "hands-on" training in music, dance, and theater by industry professionals. Through the ongoing generosity of sponsors, donors, members, and patrons, the not-for-profit 501 (c)(3) corporation bergenPAC and The Performing Arts School can thrive and enrich our community. Follow bergenPAC on Facebook (facebook.com/#!/bergenpacfan) and @bergenPAC on Instagram and Twitter.

**About bergenPAC's Capital Campaign, Invest In The Arts:**Bergen Performing Arts Center (bergenPAC) is a theater of and for the community it serves throughout northern New Jersey by leading the way with a creative focus, educational resource, and engine of economic vitality. A nonprofit 501 (c)(3) organization, bergenPAC's mission is to make live performing arts and arts education accessible to its diverse community by building an innovative home for artists and teachers of excellence and relevance who entertain, enlighten, inspire, and inform their audiences and students. bergenPAC's Performing Arts School is the areas' leading cultural and arts educational institution in Northern New Jersey, which shall guide and liberate the imagination of our youth and expand the lives of our adults. Invest in the Arts by Taking a Leading Role Supporting the Renovation and Arts Education. For more information, visit www.bergenpac.org. visit www.bergenpac.org or @bergenpac