

# Chi Children's Theater announces opening plans, 1st shows, Education @ 'The Station' - new West Loop home

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 by BWW News Desk

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Chicago Children's Theatre, the city's largest professional theater company devoted exclusively to children and families, announced grand opening plans today for Phase One of its new home - the former 12th District Police Station at 100 S. Racine Avenue, now being transformed into a leading performing arts and community destination in Chicago's West Loop.

"After a decade of staging awe-inducing productions and educational programs at museums, theaters and other venues throughout the city and suburbs, Chicago Children's Theatre is beginning a new chapter," said Jacqueline Russell, Co-Founder and Artistic Director, Chicago Children's Theatre. "At last we are moving into a space of our own, where we will create a centrally located, dynamic new family destination for all of Chicago's children and families, regardless of their circumstances or ability to pay."



The logo for Chicago Children's Theatre is displayed in a large, bold, black serif font. The word 'chicago' is on the top line, 'children's' is on the middle line, and 'theatre' is on the bottom line. The letters are closely spaced and have a classic, elegant feel.

"As a new, centrally located gathering place for Chicago's children to explore ideas and projects that bridge theater and education, the new space will bring countless benefits to this city," added Chicago Children's Theatre Co-Founder and Board Chair Todd Leland. "We will have new capacity to expand our theater programs and teacher workshops, grow our Red Kite Project into a year-round program for children on the autism spectrum and add new programs for children with special needs."

First is the building's new name: "The Station." Chicago Children's Theatre is calling its new home The Station in homage to its history as a former police station, and to underscore its focus on education. "This former police station will now be used to amplify hope, explore personal identity and promote creative expression. Our intention for this space is that its educational programming be as diverse as our city and as unique as its children," said Frank Maugeri, Community Programs Artistic Director, Chicago Children's Theatre, who will lead all curricula, teaching artists and community partnerships with The Station. "We are excited and privileged to be transforming The Station in the now vibrant West Loop neighborhood into a new civic hub for theater, art making, learning and community galvanizing."

Education at The Station will be the number one focus of the newly renovated, mixed-use facility. The building will house five classrooms, plus a space dedicated to year round Red Kite programming for children on the autism spectrum. In sum, The Station will be a new destination for all of Chicago's children to immerse themselves in inclusion, unique arts education, community galvanizing, diversity and STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art and math) curricula.

To that end, Chicago Children's Theatre is already utilizing Chicago's finest theater and visual artists, as well as partnering with renowned institutions to teach courses and camps for children ages 0 to 14. Notably, Evanston's respected Actors Gymnasium will partner with Chicago Children's Theatre to offer classes in aerial and circus arts in Chicago's West Loop. Additionally, local youth-focused [Dance Company Move Me Soul](#) will partner with Chicago Children's Theatre to present a class utilizing the musical West Side Story to provide students the opportunity to expand their theatrical singing and dancing skills.

Classes in storytelling, modern movement, hip hop, aerial and circus arts and vocal instruction, along with immersive and celebratory art making and performance opportunities, will spawn dynamic family experiences, community participatory opportunities and groundbreaking intimate productions. Additionally, the Red Kite Project will expand in scope in 2017, with an all-new Red Kite Adventure multi-sensory installation experience, as well as other increased offerings for young people on the autism spectrum.

Look for an announcement of the full schedule of classes in November, with information on how to register for the first session, which will begin on February 6, 2017. On stage: Premiere of Manual Cinema's *The Magic City* to christen new Pritzker Family [Studio Theatre](#); Grand Opening celebration set for February; Spring show is *Pinocchio*, featuring Deaf and hearing actors In late January, Chicago Children's Theatre will offer its first sneak-peek of *The Station* as a host site for the 2017 Chicago International Puppet Theater Festival.

The world premiere of Manual Cinema's *The Magic City* by the internationally acclaimed Chicago company and commissioned by Chicago Children's Theatre, will close the Puppet Festival while opening the new, 149-seat Pritzker Family [Studio Theatre](#) at The Station with a four-week residency. Loosely based on the 1910 novel by Edith Nesbit about a girl who builds a miniature city that comes to life in her attic, Manual Cinema's new adaptation will update the story for a contemporary audience using overhead projectors, paper shadow puppets, live actors in silhouette, miniature toy theater and live musical accompaniment.

"I'm very excited to have the opportunity to program this new type of performance venue for CCT, as it allows us to introduce our audience to whole new styles of theatre and performances," said Jacqueline Russell. "The new space allows us to work with exciting, internationally recognized companies like Manual Cinema, who are producing inventive, intimate new works which will resonate with audiences of any age."

Mark your calendar: the official grand opening for The Station is early January, 2017. Special inaugural events include a Gala event, a free community open house, free theater arts classes, live micro-performances, events with complimentary treats from neighboring business sponsors and the world premiere performance of *The Magic City*.

On stage next spring in the Pritzker Family [Studio Theatre](#) is a new staging of *Pinocchio*, presented with Chicago's Neverbird Project. This production, which originated at Chicago's Bell Elementary School in 2016, will feature young hearing and Deaf actors in a signed and voice performance of this all-new take on the classic fairy tale. Performance dates will be announced soon. Station Breaks events to showcase partnership with Skinner West Elementary, spur pre-opening excitement for CCT's new West Loop home

Starting in January, Chicago Children's Theatre will showcase its commitment to partnering with neighborhood non-profits and educational institutions with its new Station Breaks outdoor event series. Combining state-of-the-art technology, do-it-yourself ingenuity and broad student involvement, Station Breaks will highlight the company's new neighbors as artists and authors by transforming select exterior windows into a two-story, outdoor canvas of projected video shorts the children helped to devise.

Already, Chicago Children's Theatre is partnering with students at nearby Skinner West Elementary, a classical, fine arts and technology school to create its first Station Breaks video shorts. CCT Community Programs Artistic Director Frank Maugeri, noted Chicago video projection artist Liviu Pasare and Jacqueline Bovit, Arts Educator, will devise the first series this fall, guiding 1,000 Skinner West students as they work with green screen technology, miniatures, digital video and storytelling to become the authors and artists of their own visions and stories.

The results will be delightful projections on the exterior of The Station in January at free neighborhood events sure to draw attention to the newest family destination in Chicago's West Loop.

"This first project with Skinner West's students will showcase our dedication to neighborhood collaboration, create the foundation for our STEAM-based programming, enhance our residency model, produce new technologies to be used in future endeavors and continue the development of our partnerships with emerging artists, designers and

the next generation of theatre makers," said Maugeri. Stay tuned for dates, times and more details about Chicago Children's Theatre's inaugural Station Breaks screenings this winter.

The adaptive reuse of the existing building at 100 S. Racine is just the first phase of what will eventually be the new, expanded footprint for Chicago Children's Theatre. Phase One, aka "The Station," is where CCT's educational programming will be headquartered and start up in February. Phase One includes five classrooms, a dedicated, year round space for Red Kite interactive theater for students with autism, a lobby with box office and concessions, the flexible, 149-seat Pritzker Family [Studio Theatre](#) and support space. Phase Two will be completed in 2020, and will boast an all-new addition to the building, anchored by a second, state-of-the-art, 299-seat theater for the company's mainstage programming.

In the interim, while Chicago Children's Theatre will be offering courses, camps, family experiences and more inside The Station starting in February, mainstage productions will continue to be presented at CCT's current performance home, the [Ruth Page](#) Center for the Arts, 1016 N. Dearborn St., Chicago. Wheeler Kearns Architects, a Chicago firm led by Larry Kearns, principal, has been collaborating with associate architect Melissa Neel, Working Group One Architects, to create a new facility for Chicago Children's Theatre that emphasizes accessibility and transparency to the community. Theater planning is by Schuler Shook. Pepper Construction is the general contractor.

Since its launch in 2005, Chicago Children's Theatre has cemented its reputation as the city's largest professional theater company devoted exclusively to children and young families. The company evolved out of Chicago's need for high-quality, professional year-round children's programming to match the quality and significance of theatrical powerhouses such as [Steppenwolf Theatre](#) Company, [Goodman Theatre](#) and Lookingglass Theatre. Likewise, CCT has always believed children should be treated as the sophisticated audiences that they are, showcasing high profile and award-winning talent, inventive production values and compelling stories that challenge, educate and entertain.

Audiences have embraced Chicago Children's Theatre since its inaugural production, A Year with Frog and Toad, at the [Goodman Theatre](#) in 2006. Since then, the company's productions have featured everything from black-light scenery to live music to interactive four-dimensional sets to life-size puppets, with performances showcasing the heart of Motown to Vaudeville to contemporary, current and modern styles. CCT has also built a national reputation due to its strong focus on new work, producing 12 world premieres in the last 10 years including The Selfish Giant, The Hundred Dresses, Jackie and Me, Dot and Ziggy, The Houdini Box, The Elephant and The Whale (in association with Redmoon), Mr. Chickee's Funny Money, Leo Lionni's Frederick, Wonderland, Alice's Rock & Roll Adventure, A Snowy Day with Beatrix Potter and Jabari Dreams of Freedom. These enjoyed highly successful inaugural runs in Chicago, followed by new productions at family theaters across the U.S.

CCT has always honored a strong commitment to low-income families and children with special needs. In partnership with Chicago Public Schools, the company offers free tickets to more than 5,000 Chicago-area low-income students each season. Meanwhile, the company has pioneered immersive theater designed for children on the autism spectrum via its Red Kite Project, and recently expanded programming for children with impaired vision or hearing and Down's syndrome. Chicago Children's Theatre also offers a full roster of after school theater classes and summer camps.

Led by Co-Founders, Artistic Director Jacqueline Russell and Board Chair Todd Leland, along with new Community Programs Artistic Director Frank Maugeri, Chicago Children's Theatre is supported by a dynamic Board of Directors comprised of dedicated individuals from the fields of entertainment, philanthropy and business. Officers include Jeff Hughes, President; Lynn Lockwood Murphy, Vice Chair and Secretary; David Saltiel, Vice Chair; and David Chung, Treasurer. Chicago Children's Theatre is sponsored in part by ComEd and Goldman Sachs Gives. For more information, you can visit [chicagochildrenstheatre.org](http://chicagochildrenstheatre.org).