

Children's theater finds home in old police station

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The old shooting range at the former police station, 100 S. Racine Ave., has now been transformed into a costume room for the Chicago Children's Theatre.

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After years of moving from venue to venue, the Chicago Children's Theatre now has a permanent place to call home at the former 12th District Police Station in Chicago's Near West side.

CCT will be based at The Station, 100 S. Racine Ave., where a variety of classes and camps will be held for children of all ages starting Feb. 6.

The facility aims to create a space in which children of any background and ability have the opportunity to express themselves, said Frank Maugeri, CCT's community programs artistic director.

There will be 18 classes offered for children with a range of subjects available for toddlers to teens. Children will be performing in productions on topics relevant to their lives and what they are going through.

"We're doing two things here," Maugeri said. "We're teaching great theater, music, performance and dance. Secondly, in my experience of theater, one can really understand these greater attributes that we can use in any medium, any career."

The city sold the property for \$1, according to Patrick Pelz, director of marketing communications at CCT, an action

the City Council's Community Development Commission recommended, city documents stated. After its acquisition, a series of grants financed the building's renovation from a detention facility into a multidisciplinary arts center.



When refurbishing the old Police Station into the new arts center, the CCT tried to preserve parts of the station.

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“It’s a story of redemption,” Maugeri said. “Police stations are often places that contain the human spirit, and now we’ve transformed that into a place that unleashes the human spirit.”

The curriculum’s design and staff selection reflected Maugeri’s intention to create a space for kids to authentically express themselves, he said. The aerial arts program, run by Actors Gymnasium—a group that teaches circus arts, physical theatre and multidisciplinary arts—Maugeri noted, is an example.

Actors Gymnasium teachers will instruct students in circus arts, including trapezes and “silks,” which are fabrics suspended from the ceiling. The classes will be offered to children ranging in ages from 6 to 12.

“When you instill the values of community-oriented and collaborative art, that really influences the way children and people think and communicate and interact with their world and communities in a really positive way,” said Deanna Myers, Actors Gynasium outreach and offset partner coordinator.

The Station’s central location means children in remote areas of Chicago now have access to its programs, Myers said.

“I hope [The Station] becomes part of that community where it is and starts to build an interest in the arts and starts to help contribute to the sense of community that’s already there,” Myers said.

Maugeri said he hopes the theater will give young people a legitimate opportunity to truly express who they are, what they feel and what their ambitions are.

“[Theatre] provides a platform where they understand what it means to be in relationships and to resolve conflict,” Maugeri said. “These elements of character are what shape really powerful, good people and affect culture in a very positive way.”



Children taking classes at the Station put on performances about issues relevant to their lives, said Patrick Pelz, CCT director of marketing communications.

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