

OPINION

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Help keep the Magik alive for future generations

By Mel Zarb-Cousin
FOR THE EXPRESS-NEWS



As a first-generation American teenager, I was inspired to dream big, thanks to the Magik Theatre.

Now, as

Magik's managing director, I see that same inspiration in our audiences as we create theatrical experiences that bring children's literature to life, spark empathy and foster a lifetime love of learning.

The children's author Roald Dahl once wrote, "Those who don't believe in magic will never find it."

Today, that "magik" is at risk. Since Magik Theatre's founding in 1994, our nonprofit theater has welcomed more than 3 million students and families during 333 productions.

Our belief that the arts are for everyone means we have intentionally kept ticket and field trip fees affordable, and we have developed outstanding arts education partnerships with organizations such as the Cyndi Taylor Krier Juvenile Treatment Center, Haven for Hope and the NCAA's Read to the Final Four literacy initiative.

After weathering COVID-19's disastrous impact on performing arts groups around the world, we celebrated Magik's 30th birthday last year with expanded programming and inclusive upgrades to serve more kids than ever.

The city's Department of Arts and Culture has supported Magik's leading role in San Antonio's vibrant arts community. In 2023, however, San Antonio broke ground on the South Alamo Street public works project, right outside our theater doors.

As construction dragged past

its December 2024 completion deadline, attendance at our productions and field trip program declined, with feedback surveys singling out construction-related hassles as the biggest complaint.

During Alamo Street's 18-month (and counting) delay, the loss of ticket revenue has forced us to cut staff positions, professional development and original commissions to meet our new budget reality.

Although Magik faces a projected revenue shortfall of \$300,000 this year, directly tied to the Alamo Street construction, the city has only awarded us \$35,000 in financial relief.

Even when the dust settles on Alamo Street, the near future holds yet more challenges due to 2022 bond improvements, which require that we vacate our stage for several months in early 2026.

While we will be delighted to reopen with improved accessibility and new HVAC systems, the

short season reduces our projected ticket revenue by 25%. We have no control over the Alamo Street and bond projects, and each delay causes nerve-wracking financial uncertainty.

With developments such as Project Marvel on the horizon, we have to wonder if future downtown improvements will include similar construction setbacks and mandated closures.

If so, how many children will lose access to Magik, one of four Theatre for Young Audiences organizations in the state? Our theater's central location is essential to attracting local schools and families, as well as tourists looking for kid-friendly fun. We have been enthusiastic contributors to the "Decade of Downtown" and support the area's continued renaissance.

Even if we survive the city's short-term growing pains, in the intervening years thousands of San Antonio children could miss

out on plays that demystify their dyslexia, celebrate their heritage, and on camps and workshops that introduce them to creative self-expression and sensory-friendly performances for neuro-diverse audiences.

We need San Antonio's support more than ever to overcome our funding gap and ensure we can delight, inspire and educate for years to come.

Attend our summer hit, "Dragons Love Tacos," (tip: park at the convenient Hemisfair Garage), enroll in summer camp or donate directly via our new fundraising campaign.

Most importantly, I am asking the city and our supporters to keep believing in our Magik so generations of children can find their way to our theater and discover the life-changing power of the performing arts.

Mel Zarb-Cousin is managing director of Magik Theatre.