

Strand Theatre Shelbyville, Inc.

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Special occasion

Written by David on November, 21 2008

Banquet facility to host concert to benefit Strand

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An established Shelbyville entertainment venue - Occasions Banquet Hall - is planning an evening of fun and dancing to benefit a fledgling local entertainment option, the Strand Theatre.

Martin Zinser, owner of Occasions, along with his wife, Tami, said he is very impressed with the renovation work that David Finkel and his army of volunteers have accomplished at the former movie theater, and he decided that he wanted to hold an event to raise money for the cash-strapped Strand.

The popular band The Flying Toasters will perform at Occasions, 415 E. Hendricks St., at 9:30 p.m. on Wednesday and again on Dec. 20. Zinser and The Flying Toasters plan to donate \$3 to the Strand from each \$10 cover charge that patrons will pay to attend.

"Occasions and The Flying Toasters both want to help support live performances in Shelbyville and Shelby County," Zinser said, "and the Strand is bringing lots of live entertainment to the community."

For people wanting to attend the dance with a group of friends, reserved tables are available that will seat up to 10 people for \$180. Zinser said many of the tables for Wednesday night have been reserved, but plenty of tables are available to be reserved for the Dec. 20 event.

Those who reserve tables will enjoy hors d'oeuvres, but everyone will have bowls of pretzels and other snacks to enjoy with drinks purchased from the cash bar.

Patrons will find a few nonreserved tables and plenty of room to sit or stand and talk when taking a dancing break.

"People are already calling for December, so I suggest that those who want to attend either date call right away," Zinser said.

Tickets are available at Occasions, or customers may call (317) 421-0820 for reservations. Credit cards can't be used for the event; only cash and checks will be accepted.

"Since it is a fundraiser," Zinser said, "I can't afford to pay the fee for the credit cards in addition to donating part of the ticket price."

Room to move

The Flying Toasters have performed at Occasions twice before, and Zinser said many of those who attend prefer the nonsmoking atmosphere at Occasions as well as the roominess of the facility instead of a crowded, smoky bar.

"We have that large lobby area where people can walk around if they want a break from the dancing and music," Zinser said. "People can't enjoy themselves when they are all crammed in together."

Both of the previous bookings were a big success, and Zinser said Occasions would like to plan more performance events in the banquet hall. He is interested in finding comedians and other performers who would like to use the venue.

Zinser said he often receives calls from groups interested in holding a fundraiser, but he encourages them to try to come up

with a unique idea. He said civic groups are telling him that it is getting harder and harder to raise money.

"People need to feel like they are getting something for their money," Zinser said, "but whether a fundraiser makes money really depends on how hard the people who are putting it on are willing to work."

Occasions frequently is used as the setting for various civic events, fundraisers, parties, reunions and large company meetings, but wedding receptions make up more than half of his Saturday night bookings each year.

Eager to grow

Coincidentally, his manager at Occasions, Cathy Caito, runs a wedding cake business called Cakes by Cathy out of the restaurant. The two businesses are totally separate, but each helps the other to find additional business.

Zinser said the banquet business is just as susceptible to a weakening economy as any other business. Although his bookings are strong through the end of the year, he is eying January and February with trepidation. Normally, Occasions already has recorded numerous reservations for the upcoming year, but bookings are definitely down.

Zinser said the recent opening of Maxim Events and the splashy permanent casino that opens in the spring make for a competitive environment. He said he remembers how different the restaurant and banquet landscape was in Shelbyville when he was persuaded to open Occasions by Mike Dellinger from the Shelby County Chamber of Commerce and former Mayor Betsy Stephen.

"They came to me and told me that the city really needed a large banquet hall," Zinser said, "and at that time, there really wasn't a good place in town to hold big parties and meetings."

When he was approached, Zinser was running The Chicken Inn on East Hendricks Street, so he decided to make the investment and bought the former Parrish Lumber Co. site in 1997 with plans to turn it into a banquet facility.

"We needed a nice place to have events, and I was the one to make a commitment and go out on a limb," Zinser said of his 14,000-square-foot building.

However, shortly after opening Occasions in 2002, other restaurants continued to open in Shelbyville, and the availability of the large clubhouse area at Indiana Downs also provided new competition.

"It is great to have lots of different choices," Zinser said, "but the town will have to grow to support all these different banquet facilities."

Images on this post:

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