

WRITTEN TESTIMONY - SUBMITTED BY DAVID FAY  
ON BEHALF OF THE BUSHNELL CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

BEFORE THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE  
PUBLIC HEARING: February 15, 2012

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The Bushnell Center for the Performing Arts is the largest arts organization in the State of Connecticut as measured both by annual income and annual attendance.

The Bushnell regularly serves a market area that includes 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the residents of the State of Connecticut.

Over the past decade our annual revenues have ranged from a low of 12 Million Dollars to highs in excess of 20 Million Dollars.

The Bushnell has 55 full time employees, and employs hundreds of highly paid and highly qualified Connecticut professionals as stagehands, musicians, technicians, and many others as it manages and presents over 400 events a year.

In calendar year 2011, The Bushnell issued over 350 W2s with a gross payroll in excess of 5 ½ Million Dollars.

In addition to this, The Bushnell provides employment to many more Connecticut residents through its range of vendors including food service, custodial, security as well as accountants, attorneys and professional advisors.

In 2001 we completed a major fundraising campaign that allowed the completion of the new Belding Theatre complex, pouring well over 40 Million Dollars in construction expenditures into the region's economy. Since then we have averaged nearly \$750,000 in annual expenditures for ongoing renovation and maintenance of our facilities.

In our efforts to offset the eroding base of corporate and foundation support, which has been so negatively impacted by a decade of financial woe, we have sought to expand our earned revenue base in every way possible – so we can continue to pay for the many charitable programs we operate throughout the community.

In 2006 The Bushnell formed Elephant Eye Theatrical to develop high quality, theatrical product for Broadway and for touring markets around the world. It opened its first major production on Broadway in 2010, "The Addams Family" starring Nathan Lane and Bebe Neuwirth. We are proud to see our investment come full circle as The National Touring Production of the show arrives at The Bushnell next week! (February 21<sup>st</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup>)

In 2010, The Bushnell took another step to use its skill sets to further increase earned revenue by forming Bushnell Management Services, and successfully bidding on the contract for the

management of Rentschler Field. We have just finished our second season managing this marvelous State of Connecticut venue with great success, and are looking forward to an active and profitable summer in 2012. The Bushnell is the only performing arts center in North America to also manage a football stadium. However, many of my associates across the country have now asked for our help in their efforts to do the same with larger venues in their communities. The Bushnell is uniquely positioned to do a far better job and charge less for our services than the national for-profit management companies. And all the money stays right here in Connecticut! I might add that we are very hopeful to have the opportunity to bid on the management contract of the XL Center when the existing contract expires in 2013.

Through these and other ventures The Bushnell established nearly \$1 Million in new annual earned revenue streams. However, at the same time, we have seen our unearned sources of revenue shrivel by nearly \$1.2 Million annually. In spite of this we have continued to further expand our service to the community.

In 2008 The Bushnell conceived a vision for the redevelopment of downtown Hartford. And with the help of many, has seen this vision take on a life of its own and become known as the iQuilt. To date, The Bushnell has raised over \$2,000,000 to support the development of this important initiative. None of these funds have gone to the immediate benefit of The Bushnell, but rather have been poured (by us) into this effort, which we realize has a long-term pay off for our entire community - as well as for us.

The Bushnell raises and spends over half a million dollars each year to support our nationally renowned Partners Education program, which uses arts technologies to teach core curriculum in the Hartford Public Schools and in selected districts in the center of the state.

The Bushnell is not only an artistic and cultural treasure; it is a social and an economic force in the center of the State of Connecticut.

In spite of all we have accomplished, we have seen our endowment erode as the financial markets have historically underperformed since 2001. We took on \$20 Million in debt to help fund the construction of the Belding Theatre complex in 2001. We have reduced that amount to \$12 Million – having never missed a payment. But doing so has put tremendous financial pressure on us - and our long-term prospects.

An organization our size should have an endowment of at least 45 Million Dollars. As of today our endowment sits at just over 11 Million Dollars.

As a member of the Performing Arts Center Consortium, an association of the 30 largest and most active performing arts centers in North America, we assiduously benchmark our performance against that of our peers across the country on a very wide range of metrics. We significantly outperform most of our peers in every area of contributed income with the single exception of Government Funding. And the difference is glaring!

Last year, the average annual funding for general operating support among the 30 largest PACs in North America was in excess of \$4,000,000 per institution. Even the median of all 30 is right a \$1,000,000. The Bushnell received \$72,000.

For 10 years The Bushnell has been told that the line items were going to be abolished and everyone would be put into a competitive pool. So we have never pushed for a line item. And every year – at the end – when the budget has been finally approved and presented to the public – the line items are still there, and, in fact, more often than not – the amount remaining in the pool for competitive funding has been reduced.

Even last year – during the toughest budget wrangling in decades – not only were the line items still there – a new one appeared: \$300,000 for the Garde Arts Center in New London. I do not say this to criticize the Garde Arts Center – rather to applaud them. They deserve every penny of this funding for the services they provide in that part of the state. In fact, I would argue they deserve more. But you can only imagine how all of us across the street at The Bushnell felt. The Bushnell is the largest and most active arts organization in the state, and yet the most we could garner through the competitive pool was \$72,000.

The Bushnell appreciates both sides of the debate with regard to the co-equal branches of our government. We fully endorse the legislature’s ability to identify quality arts organizations around the state and fund them appropriately. We also fully endorse the administration’s desire to have as large a pool as possible to be used for its own intentions in funding organizations and projects it deems worthy around the state as well.

But The Bushnell can no longer wait for this to be resolved in a manner that will allow a competitive pool to be large enough for The Bushnell to begin to approach even the median number enjoyed by our counterparts around the country. We simply will not be around if we continue to wait!

We have watched the world class Hartford Ballet, its successor organization, Dance Connecticut, and the renowned, 57-year-old Connecticut Opera, all once proud artistic companies performing regularly at The Bushnell, fall into bankruptcy and disappear from the cultural landscape, leaving many artists and arts managers unemployed or underemployed and forcing them to leave the state to pursue their passion and their livelihood elsewhere.

As much as The Bushnell has wanted to step in and fill the void left by these companies and to invest resources in bringing a greater range of artistic product to Connecticut, we have found ourselves – like many others – crippled by the economic upheaval of the past decade.

As you continue these difficult and demanding budget deliberations, I know that neither this body nor the administration considers the arts to be frivolous – for that I am most grateful! But I beg of you – please fully recognize the importance of the arts, particularly in these extraordinary times – not only as the essential reflection of our humanity, but also as the economic driver that they truly are in making our communities and our state a great place in which to live and to work. And please consider The Bushnell in your deliberations!