



Appendix – 1.4 KEY STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Loring Park Neighborhood Master Plan



Miriam Must

Interviewed on January 17, 2011

The following is a summary of an interview conducted by Tom Borrup, CLPC Master Plan Consultant. Minor edits and formatting of this summary is by Peter Musty, Master Plan Consultant Team. The notes were reviewed and approved for accuracy by Miriam Must on April 25, 2011.

Red Eye Theater

Red Eye Theater (<http://www.redeyetheater.org/>) first became part of the Loring Park landscape over twenty years ago. It has garnered recognition as an important part of the Twin Cities' robust theater and contemporary arts scene from its beginnings. Founded in 1983 by artistic director Steve Busa and managing director Miriam Must, Red Eye relocated from the warehouse district to settle in the Loring Park neighborhood in 1989. The experimental producing company brings hundreds of artists and thousands of theater-goers each year to their conveniently-located yet out-of-the-way space at 15 West 14th St. between Nicollet and LaSalle. Their website proclaims:



“RED EYE is a multidisciplinary creative laboratory that supports the development and production of pioneering performance work.”

Miriam grew up in Dayton, Ohio. Having moved to the Twin Cities in 1980, the day after graduating from Grinnell College in Iowa, she now has lived most of her life in Minneapolis, and was married in the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden in 1996. Her husband, Gary Johnson, is a self-employed carpenter and designer, with a small scenic construction shop in the Midway industrial district of St. Paul.

While holding down the chief administrator role at Red Eye all these years, Miriam is also the company's best-known actor. She has originated roles in more than 50 Red Eye productions since 1983. In recent years both she and Steve have also been in high demand as arts educators throughout the Twin Cities area with a focus on integrating theater into school curriculum. For several months of the year, Miriam devotes 10 to 20 hours each week to teaching – a fraction of the weekly work schedule for a theater artist and nonprofit administrator. In the past year alone, she estimated they've taught more than 1200 elementary students and trained 400 public school teachers to help students become better readers, writers, and thinkers. The Red Eye Tableau method has been acknowledged as a high potential strategy by the Minneapolis Public Schools and its Arts for Academic Achievement program. From their work in dozens of schools across Minnesota, “We really see the impact on kids,” Miriam claims with pride.



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Red Eye’s Building on West 14th Street (Just Off Nicollet)

The side street location of the Red Eye Theater space appears rather unassuming from the outside. A small red neon sign inside the storefront window announces: “Red Eye,” telling theater patrons they’ve arrived, but indicating to other passers-by only that someone has been working too late.* The narrow, unadorned storefront disguises a more warehouse-like open space inside dominated by stage and technical areas with a modest 76 raised seats for audiences. Dressing areas, a green room, restrooms, and storage extend

still further into the center of the block. (*Since the date of this interview, the theater has installed a new sign that extends out from the building façade, providing increased visibility from both Nicollet and LaSalle.)

According to Miriam about a dozen people may go in and out of the space during an average business day – mostly artists, actors, technicians for an upcoming show, or Red Eye’s part-time marketing consultant meeting with a media representative or prospective marketing partner. On weekends and some evenings the buzz grows. The Red Eye company produces two full-scale theatrical productions each year, along with a month-long summer series called New Works 4 Weeks. Other arts groups rent the space for their productions or one-time events throughout the year. Miriam said they hope to add a third company-produced show in the coming year.

Life’s better with a little theater.

(Red Eye’s promotional tag line)

In years past, Red Eye’s programming has included various neighborhood components. In the early days of the city-wide Fringe Festival, when it was centered in Loring Park area, Red Eye was the favored multimedia venue. For eleven years Red Eye also produced a summer music and movies festival in nearby Steven’s Square Park, a series Miriam proudly pointed out was valued highly and subsequently operated by new arts organizations that emerged in the Steven Square neighborhood.

Making More Friends In the Neighborhood

Red Eye’s time in the Loring Park community has not been without challenges. Miriam described several break-ins and thefts. They lost computers and other things of value. A generous funder recently provided money for a new computer system that the theater needs to efficiently serve audiences and operate their business affairs. “We’re not going to buy the computers until we get more security,” Miriam said with a sigh. Securing access points, new doors, lighting, and the presence of more constant activity are part of the strategy she outlined. During one incident she had a call from a neighbor – a fellow artist – who saw their



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back door open late at night from his window. Miriam was grateful to have a neighbor watching out and picking up the phone.

In fact, making more friends in the neighborhood has become key to Red Eye’s strategy. “We love Lotus, Salsa A La Salsa, Joe’s Garage and many other restaurants nearby,” she boomed. They’ve begun co-marketing efforts, forming partnerships around the theater’s productions. The theater directs their audiences to nearby restaurants, which provide samples for events at the theater. Miriam would like to see these relationships grow. She’d like to see the business district fill out a little more so there would be no reason for artists and theater patrons to wander far while working or before and after performances. “It’s hard to get a lot of basics here,” she said. “You have to go downtown or south.” A new drug store recently opened immediately next door, she pointed out – something that has made life a little more convenient.

Red Eye’s artists spend countless hours holed up in the theater, which is set up as a performing arts laboratory. Work is created over extended periods for relatively short theatrical runs of four to five weeks. The theater’s focus is on building communities inspired by new ideas for the stage, and developing effective arts education strategies. These communities are defined less by geography than by a common interest in what’s new and what’s next in performance. That said, Miriam pointed out that Red Eye’s audience is primarily urban, and she readily acknowledged the benefits of building relationships in the neighborhood. She said this past winter while shoveling snow she met the owner of the apartment building next door for the first time. She loves having people come into their space and said she’d like area residents to think of

Red Eye as a neighborhood theater, where they can see new work by both emerging and established contemporary artists.



Image on this page from <http://www.redeyetheater.com>.

Miriam welcomed the re-invigoration of the Music Box – now Loring Theater – seeing it as a partner whose presence supports other businesses and creates more life and energy on the streets. Red Eye shares concerns over parking and crime with the Loring Theater, along with the challenges of attracting more neighborhood residents and visitors to their activities.

As part of Red Eye’s work in schools, Miriam spoke fondly of a nine-year partnership with the FAIR Downtown school on Hennepin and 10th, just outside the Loring neighborhood. She also noted that teachers from nearby Emerson School have participated in the Red Eye Tableau trainings. “It would be great to have an opportunity to work with some of Emerson’s students, as well,” she added. A board member, who lives in Loring Park neighborhood’s Laurel Village apartments, hosted a fundraising event in February in Wilson Tower’s party suite. “A vibrant neighborhood has places where art is made, not just sold or seen,” said Miriam. “Red Eye is a place where art is made,” she declared.

Looking Ahead in Loring: A Place Where Art Is Made

Miriam described how Red Eye has been taking a serious look into its future the past couple years. A multi-year foundation-sponsored program called ArtsLab has provided resources and expertise. Because Red Eye’s lease on the 14th Street space is set to expire in the coming year, there is uncertainty about its future location. As a result, the theater has been re-assessing its facility needs, location, and expenses. Miriam articulated a number of conditions they are seeking in terms of space and location and said they are exploring other possible Twin Cities neighborhoods.

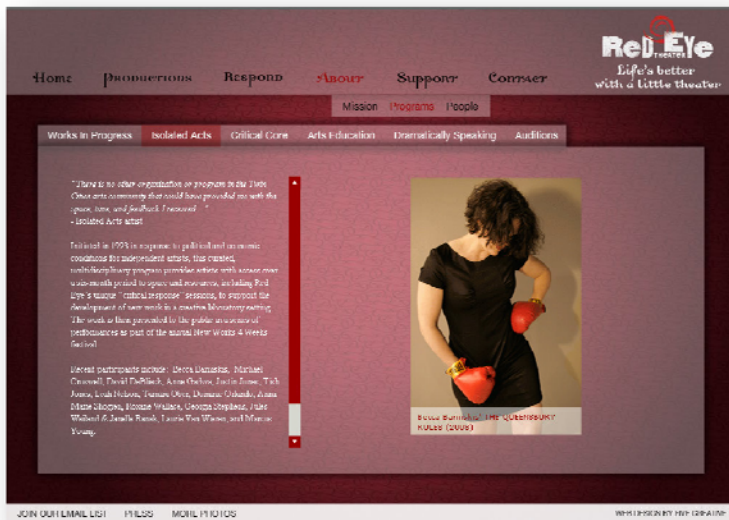


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“We would love to stay in our current site, provided we can come to amenable terms for a new extended agreement with the owner that provides the type of stability we need. The Loring Park neighborhood is a good fit for Red Eye and the space we occupy continues to serve our programming needs.”

At the time of this interview, Red Eye had just been selected by the Target Corporation for a theater make-over, a program called the Target Theater Revitalization Project. During March 2011, over 100 volunteers from the nearby corporate headquarters filled the Red Eye space, bringing fabric to recover seats, shelving, and a full array of make-over materials, amounting to a major investment in this intimate Loring Park performance venue. In addition, Red Eye is seeking a paint donation from Valspar and support from individual donors to help cover other related expenses.



A conclusion from Red Eye’s recent assessment was that there’s a need in the theater community for a flexible facility of this size, and that new work is best in a space of about 100 seats where artists are given the freedom to try things out. “We want to have this theater set up for the next generation,” Miriam said.

Another part of Red Eye’s internal re-assessment included strategic thinking about how the next generation of artists and leaders will carry on. Both Steve and Miriam have led the organization for what is approaching 30 years. They would like it to continue and

realize they have to plan sooner rather than later for others to take charge. “There are playwrights in their 20s and 30s who are phenomenal writers,” Miriam said with unabashed enthusiasm. “Young artists today have a new and different energy. They work on each other’s projects. They’re more fluid, more collaborative. Their boundaries are different. They’re incredibly optimistic and they have a lot of talent!” While her experience has brought much wisdom, Miriam exudes a youthful openness and sense of excitement about possibility. “I’m a true believer in and champion of the next generation,” she explained. As she expressed confidence in the younger folks stepping up, she added, “but we’re not going anywhere soon. We still have a lot to offer.”

The screenshot above is taken from Red Eye Theater’s website:
<http://www.redeyetheater.com>