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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Memories connected to auditorium

As a lifelong Napoleon-area resident and a graduate of Napoleon schools, some of my fondest memories are connected to the John L. Johnson Auditorium, now part of the Cultural Center of Henry County.

In high school, I performed in show choir, musicals, and the Campbell Soup Christmas shows. Later, I founded the Henry County Dance Academy, and my students held their annual recitals on that same stage. My mother was also active in Community Concerts during the 1970s and 1980s, when nationally known entertainers came to Napoleon. The auditorium gave generations of local people the opportunity to experience and participate in the performing arts right here at home.

Having lived near Bryan and Van Wert, I have seen how surrounding communities continue to support the arts. Bryan has an auditorium in its Bryan Arts and Education Center, Defiance has its historic Community Auditorium, and Van Wert has the Niswonger Performing Arts Center. Napoleon and Henry County deserve cultural opportunities as well.

Growing up, Napoleon had two bowling alleys, a movie theater, a drive-in, a roller-skating rink, an arcade, an auditorium, and a thriving downtown. Many of those opportunities are gone. If we want families to choose Napoleon as their home, we need places that enrich their quality of life.

Today, Napoleon City Schools

uses a gymnasium for performances. Its small stage, limited backstage space, and uncomfortable seating cannot provide the same experience as a traditional auditorium.

That is why the possibility of demolishing the Cultural Center and John L. Johnson Auditorium concerns me. Once it is gone, we cannot easily replace what it provides.

The Cultural Center could once again host concerts, plays, musicals, dance recitals, movies, speakers, and community programs. Its gyms could support sports, pickleball, fitness, and recreation, while other spaces could serve educational programs, meetings, lessons, and community organizations. The east end could potentially provide senior housing.

This is more than an old building. It is an opportunity to bring generations together through the arts, recreation, education, and community activities.

Before demolition moves forward, I hope we carefully consider what our community would permanently lose. I would like to see the Cultural Center preserved, restored, and filled with people again—children in the gyms, performers on the stage, families attending events, and neighbors coming together.

Preserving the Cultural Center means preserving opportunities for Henry County for generations to come.

Laura Retcher
Napoleon