

Presentation to Ashland Mayor & City Council
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Thank you for inviting us to address you today; we're here to tell you about the adaptations OSF is planning to be ready for any air quality issues which may come our way in 2019 as a result of wildfire smoke.

First, I want to make it very clear that we believe Ashland and OSF are intrinsically linked, and what our community has to offer is as a huge component of why visitors come to OSF, in addition to the experience of attending OSF and the Allen Elizabethan Theatre, and we are not abandoning either Ashland or the Elizabethan. OSF believes that its sustainability is intrinsically linked to the success and sustainability of the Ashland community in which it is based. For that reason, we are laser focused on this issue both in the immediate and long terms.

Here are some specifics of our plans:

- As you probably already know, the Angus Bowmer and Thomas theatres started previews this past Friday (March 1, 2019) and will open this coming weekend (March 7-9, 2019). We moved their opening date two weeks later in order to concentrate our audiences in the weeks when, based on past buying patterns, people are more likely to come to Ashland; and to ensure we have full houses, not half-empty ones. This has also had the good side effect of starting rehearsals two weeks after New Year's Day rather than a day or two after, which made the start of the season much easier for our staff.
- This year, the Elizabethan will start performances one week earlier, with previews beginning on May 28, the day after Memorial Day, and opening the weekend of June 7.
- We will operate the Elizabethan as normal through at least July 12 and if there is smoke before that date, we will probably have to cancel because we won't have an alternate venue available.
- From July 13 through July 29, we intend to make a daily decision – which we do based on air quality readings provided by the DEQ sensors at the downtown fire station and forecasts from the National Weather Service office in Medford, as well as the specific health requirements of the cast and crew on each production – about whether to relocate the Elizabethan performance to the Mountain Avenue Theatre at Ashland High School. In our experience, these weeks have a slightly lower likelihood of air quality issues than weeks later in the summer, so we will be selling the full capacity of the Elizabethan and intending to perform outside as much as possible.
- During the period from July 30 through August 25 we stay at the Elizabethan as long as we can, but if air quality issues arise, we will move to the Mountain Avenue Theatre and stay there on a sustained basis. We will also be selling only the capacity of the Mountain Avenue Theatre during this time, which is less than a month.

Now I know that this part may be concerning so I will offer some context.

First, some statistics which underlie the decision to sell fewer tickets during the July 30-Aug. 25 period. Attendance in the Elizabethan in late July and August has been dropping – attendance was down 10%



year over year in July from 2017 to 2018, and down as much as 25% year over year for August from 2017 to 2018. Also, it's very unlikely in general for us to sell out the entire venue, so the capacity drop seems more severe than it really is. The average per-performance paid attendance in the Elizabethan for all of 2018 was less than 800, or two-thirds of the venue's 1200-seat capacity, so we are only lowering our capacity by about half, to 400.

Our goal is to do the utmost to meet the expectations of every audience member who comes to Ashland to see a performance at the Elizabethan theatre. Over the past 6 years, the relationship between those audience members and OSF has been repeatedly strained, as air quality issues have forced performance cancellations, and capacity constraints in the various alternate venues have forced us to turn some patrons away from both locations in the same night. Our solution is to meet this challenge directly, informed by the patterns of air quality issues that have affected OSF's outdoor performances since 2013. For those predicted dates OSF will only be selling the specific number of seats in the Elizabethan that match the alternate venue's capacity.

The other reason why we are planning, during this time when air quality issues are most likely, to move to the Mountain Avenue Theatre and to stay there, is that the daily decision-making burden of whether to move our shows to another venue has been enormously strenuous for our entire staff. With a season that is already a very long, very intense marathon, this is a way we can relieve staff's uncertainty while reducing the amount of labor required to present our shows in an alternate venue.

To return to our timeline of the season:

- After August 27, we will resume making daily decisions and may return to the Elizabethan or go back and forth as conditions dictate, and
- After September 10 we will return to the Elizabethan theatre for good. Air quality issues that late in the summer are less likely, but if they arise, we would have to cancel performances, as the Mountain Avenue Theatre is not available to us due to use by the high school.

It's worth mentioning that the air quality issues related to wildfire smoke which can impact the outdoor performances typically do NOT impact any of the shows running in our indoor venues, and thanks to a generous grant from the State of Oregon, we are taking additional steps this year to ensure good air quality in our indoor venues.

We are making other changes next year to give our audience more chances to see our work and to visit Ashland, including adding as many performances as possible in the Thomas Theatre, adding a new set of performances in the Hay-Patton Rehearsal Center, and adding matinee performances of two of the three Elizabethan plays at the Mountain Avenue Theatre.

Finally, we want to say that we are working to be more engaged with all facets of the community this season so this is likely not the last time that you'll be hearing from us. One way which we're staying in touch is with a town hall meeting on March 15 with Paul; you should all have received an invitation to that. Finally, I want to give a huge thank you to Superintendent Kelly Raymond and the Ashland School District which have been hugely supportive and understanding and a tremendous help to us in planning for next season.