

## ARTS + CAMPUS

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## SAM AND MARY AUSTIN: SETTING THE STAGE

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Sam and Mary Austin arrived for their last night of the 2014 season fortified with bug spray, sun protection, snacks and their own lawn chairs.

They enjoyed the early, suitable-for-all-ages performance, an MSU original by faculty member Rob Roznowski, followed by a campy Broadway musical parody that inspired the crowd to a standing ovation. They stayed on for a late night finale of one-acts based on cult classic horror stories.

Sam and Mary say they are looking forward to MSU's next season of outstanding outdoor drama...sans lawn chairs.

The Austins have been ardent supporters of [Summer Circle Theatre](#) for 50 years and counting. In 2011 they suggested to George Peters, then chairperson of the [Department of Theatre](#), that they would like to see a new permanent home for Summer Circle and would help to fund it; this idea was endorsed by Kirk Domer when he became department chair. Their lead gift has now resulted in the just completed, state-of-the-art \$1.2 million outdoor theater at MSU.

The new performance facility, located in a courtyard between the Kresge Art Center and the Auditorium Building, features three tiers of built-in seating for 400 surrounding a circular sub-stage. Porous flooring allows rain water to pass right through.

As longtime members of the MSU community—he the former head of MSU's cyclotron, and she, a former university staff member—Sam and Mary know that outdoor performances add mightily to the vibrancy of MSU life. They wanted to make sure there was a permanent, high quality and accessible home for outdoor theater.

The Austins' leadership inspired several other past faculty to support the project: Gretal Geist Rutledge, former costume faculty and widow of the late Frank Rutledge, theater founder; Linda Nelson, retired faculty from the Department of Human Development and Family Studies; and Selma Hollander, alumnus of the Department of Art, Art History and Design and widow of the late Stanley Hollander, a faculty member in the College of Business, all joined the Austins with major gifts.

[Friends of Theatre](#), a community organization dedicated to supporting MSU's Department of Theatre, also committed \$100,000 to the project.

*Contributions are still being sought to complete the funding of the project. To learn more, contact Bridget Paff, director of development, at [paff@msu.edu](mailto:paff@msu.edu) or call (517) 353-4725.*

