

A 1965 photo of the backstage crew at Litchfield High School, shows Lee Hollaar, at left. He helped design and install the auditorium's lighting system. Hollaar returned to Litchfield last week to participate in an all-class reunion, as well as to install new lighting equipment at the Litchfield Opera House.

SUBMITTED PHOTO



STAFF PHOTO BY ANDREW BROMAN

Lee Hollaar assembles one of 32 ellipsoidal stage lights at the Litchfield Opera House last week. A former Litchfield resident, Hollaar donated the new system as part of an effort to restore the building. Built in 1900, the building was last used for city offices. It was to be torn down until a group of volunteers organized in 2008 to save the building and restore it.

Lights, sound, action

Lee Hollaar, a former Litchfield resident, donates and installs 32 stage lights and a sound system at the Opera House as part of an effort to renovate the building

By Andrew Broman
EDITOR

As a student in 1965, Lee Hollaar played a big role in setting up the stage lights at Litchfield High School.

He loved theater but felt too shy to perform and wasn't gifted at memorizing lines.

"The backstage work was perfect for me," he said.

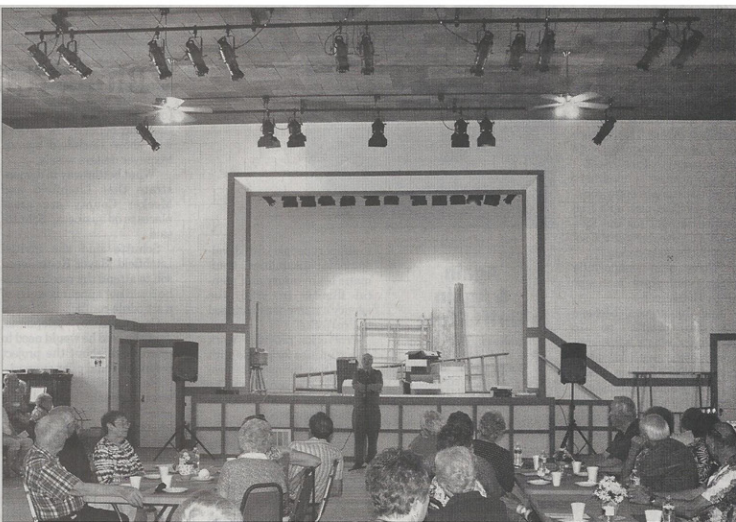
Nearly 50 years later, Hollaar is working behind the scenes again, only this time it's for the Litchfield Opera House. He donated 32 new stage lights to the Opera House, along with a new sound system.

Hollaar, 65, arranged the donation from Utah, where he lives and works as a computer science professor at the University of Utah. While he no longer has family ties in Litchfield (his father was the former president of First State Bank), he keeps

close tabs on the community and recently returned for the high school's all-class reunion.

Hollaar used his connections within the theater world, he said, to put together the system, made by a company called Electronic Theatre Controls. He spent much of last week helping to install the system at the Opera House, doing everything from testing bulbs to figuring out

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STAFF PHOTO BY JENNY DEGR

With the stage lit behind him, Lee Hollaar shows off the new lighting system Saturday at the Litchfield Opera House. The Opera House was one of the stops for the Litchfield High School all-class reunion.

Opera House: Hollaar installs lights, sound

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the lights' placement. He and other volunteers finished in time to put the lighting on display Saturday for reunion visitors.

Opera House organizers, who have been working since January 2008 to restore the building, said Hollaar's donation was an unexpected blessing.

"It's almost like Christmas at the Opera House. That's what it is," said Darlene

Kotelnicki, a member of the board for the Greater Litchfield Opera House Association Inc.

The association formed to prevent the Opera House's demolition after City Hall moved out of the building in 2002 and into its new home next door on North Marshall Avenue. Volunteers have been steadily restoring the building to its former grandeur. They've removed office spaces and redesigned the lobby area, even adding

two curved stairways to look like the original entrance way.

Built in 1900, the Opera House lost many of its original features over the years. It was turned into a community building in the 1930s before being made into office space by the mid-1960s.

In 2008, volunteers uncovered the Opera House's stage, which had been hidden behind a wall. The association decided the stage was too small and decided to expand it by eight feet.

In June 2008, the association held its first event at the Opera House, a "Bring-A-Chair Concert," since acquiring the building.

The only thing missing was adequate lighting and sound, which hasn't been a priority because of a multitude of other remodeling projects under way, Kotelnicki said.

She said her idea was to rent lighting and sound

equipment for events, but Hollaar said the Opera House needed its own lighting and sound system to become an attractive venue.

"We're hoping that now that they have this (new system), people will figure out what they want to do with the building," Hollaar said.

A readers theater play, called "Old Time Radio," will be the first featured event under the new lights. The August show will include programs, songs, ads and news from the 1920s and 1950s.

Kotelnicki said she hopes the new system will allow the Opera House to explore all sorts of opportunities, including potentially hosting a dinner theater.

Hollaar purchased a system that can be easily expanded and adjusted, as the Opera House's needs change, Kotelnicki said.

"It's going to allow us total flexibility," she said.