



FAIRMONT STATE  
UNIVERSITY™

Office of Sponsored Programs

April 16, 2026



## SPECIAL FEATURE

### Grant Funding Enables Wallman Hall Theater Revitalization

A significant part of Fairmont State University's vision—a Great Place to Learn, to Work, and to Call Home—involves engaging with the local community. Fairmont State's Town & Gown Players and the Academy for the Arts are two important programs at Fairmont State that bring the community to campus for enrichment and education. Through these programs, members of the community participate as actors and performers,

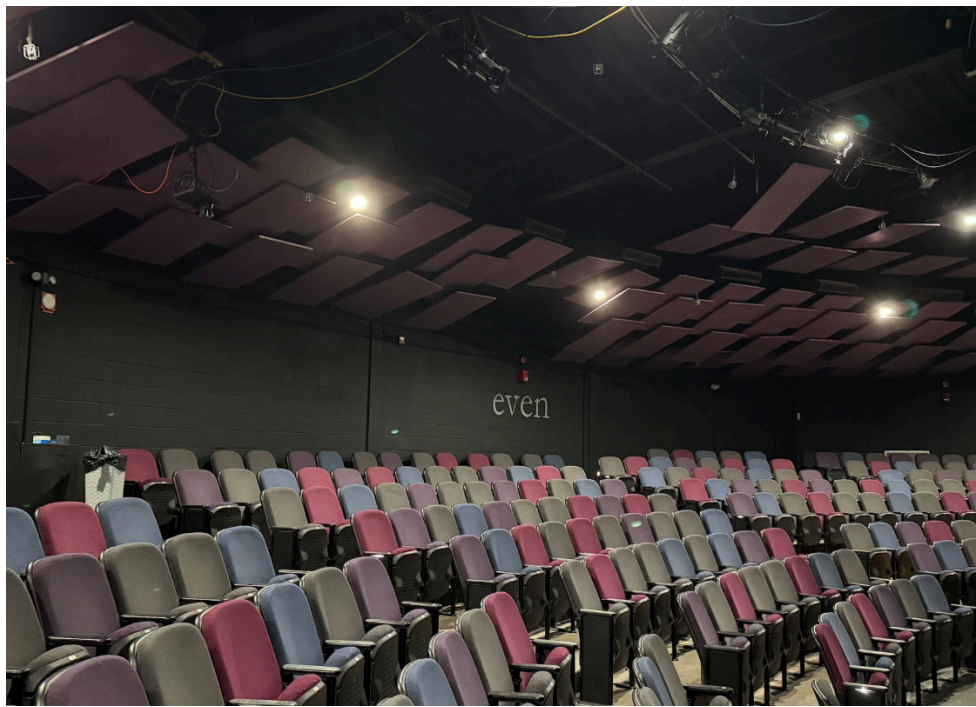
as well as audience members. The Academy for the Arts serves more than 450 youths and adults each year through classes, camps, private lessons, and performances. Theatre productions at Wallman Hall Theater on Fairmont State's campus reach an audience of approximately 8,000 annually.

Productions are enjoyed not only by Fairmont State students, faculty, and staff, but also by thousands of other students, children, families, and residents who have come to recognize Fairmont State as a local leader in cultural programming. The Wallman Hall Theater holds a diverse array of performances each year, including plays, choir concerts, band concerts, faculty recitals, student organization events, regional spelling bees, and even West Virginia's 2024 Gubernatorial Debate. The theater is a centralized campus location that serves the University, the local community, and broader region of North Central West Virginia.

Through theatrical programs like the Academy for the Arts, Fairmont State enables local youth to receive a fine arts education and to hone their craft, even before they get to college. Additionally, many adult community members participate in Town & Gown Players productions, both as actors and behind-the-scenes. Town & Gown Players usually bring two productions to the community annually, with regular community member attendance, making them an important facet of the regional community.

While the University regularly invests in the Wallman Hall Theater to ensure constituents can enjoy events, sometimes external funding is needed to develop even more momentum on a project. After Fairmont State invested in substantial improvements to the theater, including new lighting and rigging, the FirstEnergy Foundation and the George W. Bowers Family Charitable Trust awarded grants to further revitalize Wallman Hall Theater.

Funding from FirstEnergy Foundation (FirstEnergy) was to paint the Wallman Hall Theater and to cover production costs for the upcoming *Come From Away* performance slated for June 2026. Funding from the George W. Bowers Family Charitable Trust was provided to re-carpet the Wallman Hall Theater, a necessary update not only for aesthetic reasons, but also for safety, accessibility, and comfort for audiences, performers, and crews.



Leigh Anne Riley, Director of Performing Arts Outreach & Development, shared, "The renovations to Wallman Hall are going to make a large impact on the many community members, students, faculty, and staff that enter our building every day."

By adding a fresh coat of paint to both the theater and in the vestibule outside the theater, Fairmont State was able to enhance the overall experience while helping preserve the integrity and usability of this important shared venue.



"The re-painting of the Wallman Hall vestibule has made a dynamic change to our entryway which hundreds of people will see as they enter our building for theater productions, music concert events, recitals, rehearsals, classes, and visual art events," said Riley. "The re-carpeting of our theater is a much-needed update to our space in which hundreds of people who enter our theater each year will benefit. The added glow-in-the-dark stair treads will make our theater much more accessible and safer for everyone."

The re-carpeting of the 2,000 square foot theater, funded by the George W. Bowers Family Charitable Trust, is scheduled to be completed in June 2026.

Wallman Hall Theater serves as a vital cultural hub for both the campus and the broader community. These grant investments have enabled the aesthetic and professional growth of the theater, so it can continue serving audiences and performers.

Beyond investments within the physical space of the theater, FirstEnergy also provided funding to cover production costs. Fairmont State's upcoming production of *Come From Away*, a musical that explores how lives were affected and changed in the days after the 9/11 attack, will be partially funded by the FirstEnergy grant. Production costs, such as costumes, scenery, and set design, will be offset by the funding, which will allow Fairmont State Town & Gown Players to more effectively stage, design, and market their performances.



Town & Gown Players offer local youth, adults from the community, and artists the chance to participate in theatrical performances, improving their craft and furthering their potential network. These productions also provide all program participants, including local youth, community members, and technical staff, experience in a modern, high-caliber production comparable to productions offered by theatrical companies with greater notoriety.

Fairmont State University greatly appreciates the funds from the FirstEnergy Foundation and the George W. Bowers Family Charitable Trust which have enabled an improved quality of life in the North Central West Virginia community by enhancing the usability and aesthetic value of an important community space. This funding has also empowered educational initiatives in the arts by making necessary improvements to a crucial learning facility utilized by various local youth and community members.

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#### **SPECIAL NOTE:**

Any grant application, proposal, or request for external funding must be reviewed and approved **prior to submission** through an internal process managed by the Office of Sponsored Programs. Please *visit our website* for more information and to access the required forms which facilitate the internal review and approval process.



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