

NORTH COUNTY TIMES

North Coast Rep receives largest-ever donation

December 1, 2006

By: PHIL DIEHL - Staff Writer

SOLANA BEACH ---- North Coast Repertory Theater officials said Friday they have received a \$50,000 donation, the largest single contribution in the group's 25-year history.

The donors, Sheryl and Harvey P. White of Del Mar, have pledged an additional \$25,000 to the Solana Beach-based theater once the original amount is matched by other contributions from the community.

All the money will go toward operation and production costs in the North Coast Rep's \$1.5 million annual budget, which covers seven main stage productions, four theater schools, and occasional special events, said Allen Moffson, president of the theater's board of trustees. Much of the budget goes to pay the theater's professional actors.

Ticket sales cover 68 percent of the annual budget, said Karen Begin, the theater's acting general manager. Most of the rest comes from donations.

"Ideally it would be 50-50," Begin said, of the split between box office revenue and financial gifts. To be less dependent on ticket sales would allow more artistic freedom, she explained.

Producing Artistic Director David Ellenstein praised the Whites, who have made significant contributions to performing and visual arts organizations throughout San Diego County.

"Harvey and Sheryl appreciate and understand how important the arts are to our society," Ellenstein said in a news release. "Their belief that we are an organization committed to upholding performing arts creativity and professionalism is gratifying and deeply valued by everyone at North Coast Rep."

The theater has a much larger fund-raising project in the wings. It plans to construct a 27,000-square-foot building as part of the Cedros Crossing train station project in downtown Solana Beach. The building, with a 345-seat main stage, a 100- to 150-seat special performance space, classrooms, offices, storage space and more, would replace the group's present 194-seat home in a strip mall on Lomas Santa Fe Drive.

"We are looking at about \$15 million for a capital campaign" to cover construction costs, Begin said. So far about \$60,000 has been raised to cover initial design and architectural fees, she said.

Capital fundraising is at a standstill while the Solana Beach City Council considers plans for the Cedros Crossing project, which includes a large parking structure, restaurants, shops, offices and apartments. The council has scheduled public hearings on the project for Jan. 17 and 18.

"You can't raise money for something unless you know it's going to happen," Begin said. "I think the support is definitely going to be there."

City Council members have spoken favorably of the Cedros Crossing project and the theater, and approval appears likely.