

Gleason goes all-in on LEDs; the Florida Tech venue among handful of theaters equipped from lobby to stage

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Among the first places new Florida Tech students visit for orientation and the last place they see before walking over to the university gymnasium for graduation, Gleason Performing Arts Center has spent its nearly 52 years as an unobtrusive but essential facet of campus life.

As a host of events, from concerts and lectures to plays and films, the 483-seat venue named after benefactor W. Lansing Gleason, the former Eau Gallie mayor, has also been a key link between the public and Florida Tech.

When it officially opened on Oct. 14, 1967, Gleason was described in publicity materials as “one of the finest and most fully equipped private auditoriums in Brevard County.” Over the years, that distinction has dimmed.

Gleason is now the opposite of dim. It is, in fact, blazing, after a summer-long project replaced the 1960s-era lighting system from lobby to stage with cutting-edge LED

lights. “This is a huge jump in technology,” Jeffrey Richardson, Gleason’s assistant manager, said of the \$225,000 project.

Richardson and Gleason Manager William O’Steen, who were hired within a week of each other in July 2018, have installed 129 fixtures that will bring new capabilities and substantial cost savings.

Gone are the traditional lights that require colored “gels” to alter their white light — sheets of cellophane that would start slowing melting the moment the lights came on. The new lights are all multi-color, allowing operators to produce a near-infinite spectrum by blending the red, green, blue, amber, white and lime LEDs within each individual fixture.

The project also involves the installation of a fleet of movable lights to compliment the traditional stationary fixtures. That allows for the most flexible and interchangeable focus positions possible.

The new lighting system, far more efficient than the incandescent-like lights it replaced, is expected to cut the theater’s electrical use in half. The upgrades and improvements move the theater toward becoming one of the most

versatile venues available both on the stage and in the auditorium.

Working with international lighting manufacturer Chauvet, whose global headquarters are in Miami, and the Orlando location of vendor Barbizon Lighting Co., another international company, O’Steen and Richardson involved Florida Tech students in many aspects of the project, including helping to develop the computer network infrastructure that links all the LEDs. Furthermore, the proximity of the two primary vendors means students may have additional opportunities for hands-on training direct from the manufacturer.

“We were very intentional about that,” O’Steen said of the student involvement.

With just a handful of theaters in the U.S. and overseas using LEDs from back to front the way Gleason is, the new lights — coupled with new seats installed in 2017 and the refreshed management approach O’Steen and Richardson bring — are expected to generate heightened interest.

“We will be offering something that nobody has the ability to offer,” O’Steen said.

Richardson added, “Gleason was one of the area’s earlier theaters when it opened and was advanced for its day. Once again, it is at the head of the list.”

For an interactive, 360-degree tour of Gleason, visit <http://click360.me/tours/fit/gleason/>. Additional information on Gleason is available at www.fit.edu/gleason.

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