



Nao Tsurumaki Named Executive Director of Garden Theatre

Tsurumaki Returns to His Central Florida Arts Roots as Theatre Celebrates 10th Season

WINTER GARDEN, Fla. (June 28, 2017) – Nao Tsurumaki, who launched his theater career in Central Florida 16 years ago, will lead Winter Garden’s historic Garden Theatre into the next decade as executive director, the theater’s board of directors announced today.

A former general manager of the Orlando Repertory Theatre and executive director of Children’s Chorus of Washington in Washington, D.C., Tsurumaki is eager to grow the already-successful Garden Theatre as its 10th anniversary season approaches.

“I’m delighted to see Garden Theatre thriving artistically and financially – it’s become a key player in this arts community,” Tsurumaki said. “What the board and the staff did in the last 10 years is remarkable, and I’m honored to join the team in this anniversary season and to provide leadership into the next decade.”

After an extensive search to replace former executive director Alauna Friskics, who now runs Orlando Fringe, the Garden Theatre Board of Directors said that Tsurumaki would begin his leadership role July 10. As he heads the effort to further grow and develop the downtown Winter Garden theater that attracts 65,000 guests each year, Tsurumaki will be charged with developing top-quality artistic and educational endeavors, said Paul Oppedisano, board president.

“We are thrilled to have found someone with Nao’s talent, experience and passion for the arts to lead the Garden Theatre team into our next decade,” Oppedisano said. “Our national search ended when we found the ideal candidate right here in Orlando. Nao fits in perfectly with the Garden Theatre’s amazing spirit.”

A native of Japan, Tsurumaki has fond childhood memories of attending theatrical performances with his mother, Yoko and wanting to know all about what happens “behind the curtain.”

His passion for the theater led him to the University of Central Florida to study the arts and, in 2001, Tsurumaki landed a position in stage management at the former Seaside Music Theater in Daytona Beach, Fla. He jumped at the 2004 opportunity to work as a national tour management intern with Disney Theatrical Productions on Broadway. Soon after, he was appointed Orlando Rep company manager, which evolved into a general manager role through 2011. That's when he was tapped to be executive director of Children's Chorus of Washington in Washington, D.C., a leadership position he enjoyed for two years.

But Tsurumaki's heart remained in Central Florida. In 2013, when he and his wife, Megan, were expecting their first child, the couple returned to Orlando where Tsurumaki joined Nemours Children's Hospital in a role involving instructional design and talent development. When the Garden Theatre position opened, Tsurumaki seized the opportunity.

Becky Roper, Garden Theatre founding president and trustee emeritus, said Tsurumaki has a "keen sense of the core values of our operation, and he brings to the table a fresh perspective toward the board's long-term strategic goals.

"It's an exciting time for the theater to experience its first transitional leadership," Roper added. "Still youthful, but with firm financial footing, we have a lot of goals and dreams for the theater. It's a wonderful time to welcome Nao to the Garden Theatre family as we mature into our second decade with a fresh look at where we want to go as an organization in our community and regionally."

Gene Columbus, Tsurumaki's former UCF professor and colleague at Orlando Repertory Theatre, says Tsurumaki will approach the role with a long-term vision that can take Garden Theatre "to the next level."

"He is a well-respected theater professional who knows the community, and he comes with a solid understanding of Orlando and the arts scene," said Columbus, Orlando Rep executive director and former Garden Theatre board member. "He is exceptionally well organized and understands budgets, programming and marketing, and he works closely with the experts in those fields. I'm thrilled for Nao and even more thrilled for the Garden Theatre."

Tsurumaki said that he has watched the evolution of the Garden Theatre since it opened. "I've often thought how amazing it would be to take part in a community venture like

this,” said Tsurumaki, who will be involved in every aspect of the theater’s growth. “Ten years ago, downtown Winter Garden wasn’t the destination it is now, and a large part of that growth was due to the way Garden Theatre grew and became a part of the social fabric. Now, on any given weekend, you will find vitality and this wonderful energy in terms of a Florida-downtown social picture. I’m very excited to explore different ways we can inject theater into the lives of this community.”

Tsurumaki, his wife, Megan, 3-year-old son Luke, and new baby Hannah live in Orlando.

Garden Theatre of Winter Garden will celebrate its 10th anniversary during the 2017-18 performance season. Originally built in 1935 as a single-screen cinema, the theatre was the first in Central Florida built for “talkies” and was a gathering place for locals to watch the latest newsreels and films of the day. The building was restored to its former glory in 2008, and the 299-seat Garden Theatre, with a current annual budget of nearly \$1.5 million, has grown to a performing arts center with extensive programming that includes professional live theatre, concerts, dance, special events, movies and a thriving summer camp and arts education program. Visit www.gardentheatre.org or contact 407.877.4736 for details about the 2017-18 season. Garden Theatre is located at 160 W. Plant Street, Winter Garden, FL 34787.