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"Partridge Family" star David Cassidy gets up close and personal with fans in a July 2007 performance at the Arcada Theatre.

Jewel: New marquee on list for future theater repairs

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theater had so far been an unprofitable venture that swallowed hundreds of thousands of dollars with little return.

Slowly, Onesti continued with renovations, ramped up public relations and began relaxing his booking budget, among other efforts. By 2007 — the same year an award-winning blues club closed just a block away — Onesti was bringing to town Springfield, of "Jessie's Girl" fame; Italian rock star Zucchero; and David Cassidy of "The Partridge Family."

The sellout crowds started to arrive, and the Arcada's reputation began to rebound.

"It took some time, and there were growing pains like with anything else, but I think they've really hit their stride now," said David Richards, a 5th Ward city alderman and executive director of the Downtown St. Charles Partnership. "Obviously, we're gratified Onesti Entertainment has found its feet and found a stronghold here."

Richards added Onesti earned a lot of support by being active locally.

Onesti has been known to open the theater's doors for just about any community event, be it a free concert, school program or tour. And he's "really made strides" in coordinating and cross-promoting with downtown

Arcada manager gets national honor in N.Y.

Topping an already successful year for Ron Onesti, the Arcada Theatre manager has been honored with a National Ethnic Coalition of Organizations award.

In May, Onesti joined the likes of actor Gary Sinise and Coca-Cola CEO E. Neville Isdell in receiving the Ellis Island Medal of Honor.

The award recognizes movers and shakers of diverse backgrounds. It's been presented to six U.S. presidents and several Nobel Prize winners, athletes and artists.

Onesti accepted the award at Ellis Island in a patriotic ceremony that included a fireworks display at the Statue of Liberty.

He said his father, Gaetano, came through Ellis Island from Naples in 1905 to begin a new family, eventually settling on Taylor Street in Chicago's Little Italy, where he was a tailor. Onesti was nearly speechless when he received the award.

restaurants, Richards said.

"He's really exposing the history and appeal of the theater to a wider audience," Richards said.

To Onesti, one hurdle remains: drawing consistently



COURTESY OF ONESTI ENTERTAINMENT

Arcada Theatre manager Ron Onesti is pictured with singer-songwriter Randy Owen after accepting the National Ethnic Coalition of Organizations' Ellis Island Medal of Honor in New York.

"I kept looking around at the other recipients," he said, "and couldn't believe I was one of them."

strong crowds who return with family and friends. To that end, his booking budget has increased, even topping \$100,000 for some high-end performers like comedian Martin Short, who made a

rare appearance at the 900-seat theater in February.

"It's not as easy as people think," Onesti said. "You don't just book people. There's a science to it."

Onesti, 46, of Wood Dale, has more than 25 years' experience in concert promotions. His talent list boasts rockers like Cheap Trick, Chuck Berry and Chicago.

His firm also manages Studio A at NBC Tower and the National Italian American Sports Hall of Fame in Chicago, as well as events at a Country Club Hills amphitheater. And he books entertainment at fairs and festivals across the region.

Despite having expressed interest in buying the Arcada, Onesti is still leasing, he said. He declined to elaborate but made clear he has much more in store for the theater.

He's already scheduled such acts as The Guess Who, Neil Sedaka and KC & The Sunshine Band for this year and is bringing in Jones and Springfield for repeat performances. Last month, '80s pop star Richard Marx played his second Arcada show.

Onesti is also proposing a joint-funding project with the city to replace the marquee at a cost of about \$75,000.

"I'm always trying to make it better, trying to better the experience," he said. "That marquee defines downtown. It should be a source of pride for everyone."