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COLLABORATIVE PROJECT LAUNCHES SENSORY-FRIENDLY PRODUCTIONS

A sensory-friendly production of *Aladdin Jr.* will be presented at The Palace Theatre in Greensburg (PA) this March through a collaborative effort among several organizations to bring live theatre to those with disabilities or sensory-processing differences. The Eileen Wood Memorial Fund enables Westmoreland Cultural Trust and Stage Right! to launch this new local initiative and hope to expand its reach to additional arts organizations, offering individuals and their caregivers a magical experience for all patrons and increase accessibility to live theatre. Such productions involve adapting house rules and audience environment, creating alternative ticketing and seating arrangements, as well as pre-theatre preparatory activities for those in need. The Palace event is slated for **Sunday, March 13 at 2 PM**. A suggested donation of \$15 for adults and \$12 for students for the general admission event will ensure the development of future sensory-friendly programs; tickets are available free of charge upon request from The Palace Theatre Box Office at **724-836-8000** or **online at www.thepalacetheatre.org** **Tickets will also be available at the door.**

This sensory-friendly production of *Aladdin Jr.* will be a shorter, one-act version. Slight adjustments to the production are made and each show is performed in a friendly, supportive environment for an audience of families and friends with children or adults who are diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder or other sensitivity concerns. With about one percent of the world population having autism spectrum disorder and a prevalence in the United States estimated at 1 in every 68 births, more Americans live with an autism spectrum disorder. Currently 3.5 million Americans are living with an autism spectrum disorder, increased by 119.4% from 2000. Autism is the fastest-growing developmental disability. Not only do sensory-friendly productions tailor to the needs of this growing population, there are also approximately 13.1% of individuals living with autism and other physical, social and cognitive disabilities in Pennsylvania who deserve the opportunity much like Eileen Wood experienced.

The love of theatre became Eileen Wood's passion, like many others in our community. Although Eileen lived with her disabilities it did not stop her from enjoying the music, dance and shows. This interaction allowed her to form relationships with cast members of Stage Right!'s productions who would lovingly anticipate her presence. She passed away April 14, 2015, at the age of 26. The Eileen Wood Memorial Fund stipulates that distributions will be used solely and exclusively to support sensory-friendly performance in Westmoreland County



that are designed to serve patrons with sensory sensitivities and other special needs. The fund's goal is (1) to provide sensory-friendly arts organization productions for individuals with sensory, social, and learning disabilities, raising an initial amount of \$25,000 through partnership and support from like-minded organizations, political representatives and potential donors, and (2) to prepare individuals appropriately for production through preparatory materials.

A sensory-friendly performance is a family experience fostering attendance and meaningful experiences at performing arts venues. Supporting this initiative, in addition to Westmoreland Cultural Trust and Stage Right!, are Achieva, Brain Balance, Family Behavioral Resources, Value Behavioral Health of Pennsylvania, The City of Greensburg, Community Foundation of Westmoreland County, and Dan and Marcia Wood.