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Cape Fear Regional Theatre and Fayetteville State University Announce New Partnership Bringing the Arts, Literacy and Higher Education Together

Fayetteville, NC — Cape Fear Regional Theatre (CFRT) and Fayetteville State University (FSU) are joining forces for a new partnership. Designed to connect Cumberland County students with the transformative power of live theatre, this collaboration will create new opportunities for engagement between the region's oldest professional theatre and one of North Carolina's leading institutions of higher education. FSU has donated \$25,000 to CFRT, joining the theatre's 2026-2027 season as a season sponsor.

For CFRT, the partnership arrives at a significant moment in the theatre's history. Established in 1962, CFRT is preparing to welcome the community into its expanded facility following a \$25 million capital expansion project. The theatre expects to impact approximately 75,000 people during the 2026-2027 season, making its partnership with FSU an opportunity to connect an even broader audience with the arts, education, and the future of the Fayetteville community.



Mary Kate Burke & Ella Wrenn of CFRT are joined by FSU Provost and Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Scott Krawczyk, Zahra Shekarkhar, assistant professor and faculty senate chair, and members of FSU's police and public safety and strategic communications departments.

At the center of the partnership is CFRT's "Page to Stage" program. Through the collaboration, CFRT will bring every fourth-grade student in Cumberland County Schools (CCS) to Fayetteville State University for a free performance of *The Lightning Thief* in

Seabrook Auditorium in fall 2026. Before attending the performance, students will participate in 8-10 weeks of in-class reading and creative engagement activities developed by CFRT in partnership with CCS, the Cumberland County Literacy Council, and the United Way. The curriculum will support North Carolina education standards while exploring the themes and world of *The Lightning Thief*.

“This type of collaboration is a win-win for the community, and we are so proud to expand this program in partnership with FSU. Both institutions will benefit tremendously, and we welcome the opportunity to deepen our connection to FSU and our joint service to young people in such robust and intentional ways,” said Mary Kate Burke, Artistic Director of Cape Fear Regional Theatre.

CFRT will present *The Lightning Thief* at Seabrook Auditorium, giving thousands of Cumberland County students an opportunity to experience a university campus while enjoying a professional musical theatre production. An FSU representative will welcome students before the performance, creating an intentional connection between their arts experience and the possibilities of higher education. The partnership also creates opportunities for FSU students and staff to learn directly from theatre professionals. CFRT will provide training in technical theatre disciplines including lighting, sound and set construction, sharing professional expertise and current industry practices with FSU’s teams.

FSU Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Scott Krawczyk is excited about the partnership and said, “We are very pleased to partner with Cape Fear Regional Theater as it enters this exciting chapter in its impressive history of supporting programs like Page-to-Stage and bringing nationally acclaimed theatrical talent to the region. This partnership will benefit our students through immersive technical training in a professional theater setting, and it will also provide students, faculty, and staff with opportunities for complimentary attendance at first-rate performances. Through this partnership, FSU demonstrates its ongoing dedication to community engagement and to enriching the region’s artistic and cultural experience.”

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Cape Fear Regional Theatre is a stage for all, and we believe that world-class art shouldn’t be a world away. We are committed to the highest standards of excellence across our artistic productions, educational offerings, and community outreach. CFRT provides a gathering place where people of all ages and backgrounds can laugh harder, think deeper, and grow together through unforgettable live experiences. Inspiration lives here. Cape Fear Regional Theatre is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization located in Fayetteville, NC. CFRT.org

Founded in 1867, **Fayetteville State University** is a constituent institution of The University of North Carolina System and the second-oldest public institution of higher education in the state. FSU is a historically black university offering degrees at the baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral levels. With over 7,600 students, Fayetteville State University is among the most diverse institutions in the nation. To learn more about Fayetteville State University, visit www.uncfsu.edu.