Several commitments, including the largest single gift ever received by Chautauqua Institution, have been made by three longtime Chautauquans toward the rehabilitation of Chautauqua’s historic Amphitheater. To date, approximately $13 million has been committed to what President Tom Becker describes as “the most important facility in the life of this community.”

“Chautauqua is now in a strong position to raise the balance of funds needed for the renovation,” adds Chautauqua Foundation CEO Geof Follansbee. “We hope these first gifts will help us bring closure on several additional commitments prior to the end of the year.”

The estimated budget for hard construction costs is $25 million, and as with other recent capital projects, the Amphitheater will also require a sizeable endowment—some $3.5 million at a minimum—to ensure the maintenance and sustainability of the enhanced facility. “We hope that every person in the Chautauqua community will contribute as they are able and share in the care and maintenance of this critical structure,” says Follansbee. “Broad community participation is key, and there will be opportunities for donor recognition at every contribution level.”

As Tom Becker put it: “These extraordinary gifts create enormous momentum and excitement about getting to the finish line sooner rather than later. We are grateful to these early lead donors and look forward to building a large roster of families who are ready to raise the bar on our programming possibilities by these essential improvements to Chautauqua’s most prominent platform and stage.”

Through its most recent strategic plan, Chautauqua’s Trustees made a commitment to proceed with any major capital projects only when all the necessary funds have been raised. Depending on the completion of the construction drawings, a successful bidding process, and completion of fundraising this spring, the Trustees may be able to sign off on a construction schedule as early as May of 2014.

To date, the Lippman Kanfer Family Foundation of Akron, Ohio, has provided the resources necessary to develop the project design and schematics. Marty Serena of Serena/Strum Architects has led the design process under the guidance of Ted Lownie, a founding architect, and as lead architect in the restoration of the Darwin Martin House in Buffalo. He is examining the plans with an eye toward maximizing the preservation of historic materials and design elements.

“From the very beginning,” says Tom Becker, “we have held firm to our belief in the importance of retaining the openness and intimate atmosphere of the Amp, which is at the core of our programming and our identity as an Institution. At the same time, our aim is to have a hundred-year structure that can meet the demands of a 21st century program and enhance the comfort and creative potential of all our arts programs and guest performers.”

“Broad community participation is key, and there will be opportunities for donor recognition at every contribution level.”

—Geof Follansbee

MAJOR GIFTS PROPEL AMPHITHEATER REHABILITATION PROJECT FORWARD
The Williams family: THE CHAUTAUQUA FUND

Kathy and Brian Williams were immediately taken with Chautauqua. During medical school at Northeast Ohio Medical University, both served as Elderhostel ambassadors, escorting older adults on trips and tours designed for the sheer joy of learning. Now they relish the vision of vibrant and eager students of all ages in pursuit of knowledge all across the Institution grounds.

It’s a welcome contrast to the hospital environment where Brian trains new medical residents as they master the diagnosis and care of people for whom illness predominates. He is Professor of Anesthesiology and Director of Ambulatory Anesthesia at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine.

Kathy, too, practiced for 10 years as a physician who was also trained in public health. She now works full time parenting the couple’s four boys—Eric (14), Adam (12), Jason (10) and Brandon (8).

The family had visited and enjoyed the Disney Institute in the 1990s, but then friends told them about Chautauqua, which was much closer to their home in Oakmont, Pa. They began coming regularly in 2005 and bought a condo on Elm Lane in 2011. “We’re building a legacy for our family,” says Kathy. “My mother loved it immediately, and the kids’ favorite summer activities are here.”

Like many parents their age, the Williamses are also busy building a nest egg to send their children to their home in Oakmont, Pa. They began coming regularly in 2005 and bought a condo on Elm Lane in 2011. “We’re building a legacy for our family,” says Kathy. “My mother loved it immediately, and the kids’ favorite summer activities are here.”

Like many parents their age, the Williamses are also busy building a nest egg to send their children through college—no small feat these days. “We don’t have a lot to donate, but we appreciate the gifts of others that matched our gift to the Chautauqua Fund last year,” Kathy explains. The couple attended the president’s reception for new property owners last year. “We know gate prices don’t cover everything. They couldn’t possibly,” says Brian. “So we contribute what we can. The kids love watching the thermometer on the Colonade.”

Kathy smiles. “We have to keep it going. I have to stop myself from talking constantly about Chautauqua to friends back home. They are amazed to hear about all Chautauqua has to offer in one place.”

“When some of these folks visit and discover all Chautauqua has to offer, they’ll come back on their own,” Brian says.

When asked about the impact of Chautauqua on their children, Brian is quick to answer. “I’ve been asking the boys to be more conscientious about the amount of water we use. And we talk about what we can do as a family to help preserve the Allegheny River, which is near us back home. That all came from last year’s theme on water.”

Kathy says she was pleased to take the boys to see The Roméo & Juliet Project, especially since Eric studied the play in school. The family also attended the sacred song service this year in which Chautauquans remembered those who had passed away since the last season. “They were fascinated by the Latin, and moved by the music and the service. It expanded their horizons,” she says.

For Brian, “The Pursuit of Happiness” theme week was also a point of powerful reflection on his professional life. “Listening to Thomas Jefferson [actor Bill Barker] and Professor Rawlings the other day in the Hall of Philosophy was great,” he says. “They analyzed Seneca’s doctrine: ‘happiness is the aim of life, virtue the foundation of happiness, and utility the test of virtue’. I am going to take that back as a mantra to my residents. Is our work useful in a federally mediated health environment? Yes. Can I be happy in my work? The answer is a resounding yes.”

Brian, who also has an MBA, is alluding to the satisfactions of his groundbreaking research on the use of specific nerve block drug combinations in orthopedic surgery.

This new concept in anesthesiology, for which he has been a thought leader, has improved patient care and satisfaction, while also creating new efficiencies in the operating room and hospital by reducing the required length of hospital stays. He was recently honored with Northeast Ohio Medical University’s Distinguished Alumna Award for his auspicious marriage of science and business.

Both of the Williamses were also taken with Harvard professor Robert Putnam’s platform lecture on the economic, social, and health disparities between the children of college-educated parents and those whose parents only reached high school. “Our children have classmates who don’t have the advantages of our kids,” says Kathy, who regularly volunteers with various community service groups in Pittsburgh. “We’ll take Putnam’s idea to heart to understand these kids.”

The Williams family says they will also take Chautauqua home with them in the form of the Cinema movie list, films they’ll rent and watch in the off-season. They’ll read some of the recommended CLSC books and eagerly await the announcement of next year’s nightly entertainment and the next roster of Special Studies courses. But most of all, they’ll remember the 2013 season as the one in which Brandon, their youngest, graduated from the tandem bike he once shared with one of his parents, to his own.
Fullfilling the Promise

During my lifetime, I have witnessed Chahtauqua’s small staff and a large group of volunteers prepare and execute four capital campaigns. The first was in 1974 when my father, Shorty Follansbee, and other Institution leaders were responding to a sense of emergency around the dilapidated state of the Amphitheater. That year was, of course, the 100th anniversary of the founding of Chautauqua, and that comprehensive campaign for $8.5 million shored up the Amp and was the first major fundraising effort since an earlier generation had managed to save the Institution from a crippling debt in 1936.

“The Second Century Campaign,” as it was called, was followed by three more comprehensive initiatives—the Challenge, Renewal, and Idea campaigns—all of which were focused on building our fundamental capacity as an institution. During this four-decade period, several generations of Chahtauquans invested generously in upgrading our facilities and programming. Today we have the kind of rehearsal and teaching spaces warranted by the talents of the faculty and students in our schools of visual and performing arts. We have built a reputation and a presence in inter-religious dialogue through the Abrahamic Initiative, which has now expanded beyond its original boundaries to include other faith and spiritual traditions. We have improved our youth facilities, incrementally renovated the Athenaeum Hotel, preserved the Massey Organ, renovated our gallery spaces, rehabilitated the Hagen-Wensley House, added to our fitness facilities for all ages, and much more.

We continue to persuade speakers of a national and international caliber to lecture on our platform for compensation that is often significantly less than they might receive elsewhere. We have begun partnerships with peer institutions of international distinction—Colonial Williamsburg, National Geographic, PBS—collaborations that multiply the capacity of our staff and reach of our program.

There is no turning back the clock on certain social trends that challenge the Chautauqua our grandparents knew. The demand for more diverse forms of youth programming, alternative popular entertainment, and inventive food services and short-term housing are part of the new fabric of our nation’s culture. Two parents working in a household with shorter vacation times is the current reality for most. Young people preparing for college have many summer opportunities that take them far from home as volunteers or for other forms of special study.

There are also several social trends working in our favor. People can now find out about and experience Chautauqua’s content digitally, and put another way, our message can have greater reach without significant expense. The turnover in visitors and shorter stays means that more people can experience Chautauqua in a season and come to know this special brand of community. The ease and frequency of world travel brings a broader menu of speakers and other guests who lend power to our programming. Now comes The Chautauqua Promise Campaign, which will launch as a comprehensive public fundraising effort in early 2014, and which will make possible the next significant chapter in Chahtauqua’s story.

Delivering on Chautauqua’s Promise, as our boards see it, means fully utilizing and more broadly sharing the significantly expanded capacity we have developed over the past forty years for civil dialogue, innovative teaching and arts performances, religious inclusion, environmental and financial sustainability, and a broader engagement with world outside Chautauqua’s gates.

Can we be a leading voice for a return to civil discourse in this country, the promotion of artistic innovation, and a greater understanding of the roots of religious conflicts worldwide? Can Chautauqua Institution ramp up our sustainable practices and historic preservation in such a challenging natural environment? Can we be better known as an institution of national stature alongside the partners with whom we collaborate? The Board of Trustees, through its comprehensive strategic plan, has said we can and we must.

The Board has determined that it is time for Chautauqua to look outward toward a broader audience, and for all of us to have a part in taking the skills and lessons of Chahtauqua home to be applied in our local communities where we lead and volunteer. The promise also means holding fast to our history of affordability, the intergenerational nature of this yearly gathering, and the opportunities for young families to provide an unparalleled experience of safety and community for their children.

To the extent that philanthropy can offset the expenses that must otherwise be covered in the cost of a gate pass, we will limit the cost of Chahtauqua for families. To the extent that philanthropy can secure and maintain our historic and new facilities through endowment, we will be sustainable. To the extent that philanthropy can help ensure adequate resources for succession planning—specifically the kind of salaries expected and required in the future for program and artistic leadership at an Institution of this stature—we will thrive and grow in programmatic excellence.

Already a number of Chahtauquans have stepped forward in bold ways to make the Promise palpable. As you reflect this winter on what Chahtauqua offers your family, please consider joining the community in making this new promise to future generations—a Chautauqua that will continue to be relevant, affordable, and visionary in its engagement with the complex world in which we all live.
Keeping Chautauqua Relevant for Youth and Young Adults: THREE STORIES OF INNOVATION

What is available at Chautauqua for young people who age out of Club and don’t want to be a counselor? It’s a question that many parents ask. For Miles and Elmore DeMott, the answer is on their back porch. The Montgomery, Alabama, couple has been coming to Chautauqua for 15 years after being intrigued by a description of the Institution in the philosophical novel Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance by Robert Pirsig.

Now they own a pontoon boat called “The Hull of Philosophy” and a 1960s-vintage house on Waugh that they bought three years ago. Their daughters—Mary Elmore, 15 and Anne Miles, 13—have aged out of Club themselves.

“Being from Alabama, my girls love getting up here where it’s twenty degrees cooler in the summer, but that lake water is just too cold, and Daddy is not going to make them go back to Club,” Miles says with a twinkle in his eye. DeMott is a novelist and real estate developer who also characterizes himself as “a recovering academic.” Elmore, his wife, is a former banker and one-time executive director of the Montgomery Area Business Committee for the Arts, who now devotes herself to fine art photography. Together they hosted a week’s event that provided lunch on their patio following the 10:45 lecture and invited young people who are their daughters’ ages and older.

“These kids tend to be the type who would belong to the literary society or the AV club. They go to band camp. They are voracious readers and spend time on their computers. They all have very different backgrounds and are curious about each other,” DeMott says. “We’ve talked a lot in these sessions about religion, faith, vocation, and family. Some are involved in the Abrahamic Program for Young Adults. I just try to keep everyone in the discussion, but they do most of the talking. They also keep each other informed on events. I know there are so many kids here who would enjoy plugging into this kind of conversation.”

One day this summer the menu was sloppy joes and soft drinks. The group around the DeMotts’ picnic table included an 18-year-old who is now in his first year at the University of Virginia, a young man from Silverton, Oregon, who is an avid reader and blogger about science and politics, a young woman from Belarus who was spending her first week in the U.S. at Chautauqua, along with her boyfriend, a longtime Chautauquan now in graduate school at Princeton. The DeMotts’ elder daughter was not present for the gathering. She was in Costa Rica, and their younger daughter Anne was soon to make an appearance.

Every year the DeMotts also host a Chautauqua in their dining room back home in Montgomery. They try to model civil dialogue with their friends and demonstrate how Chautauqua works. “People think we’re weird,” says Miles.

With these summer gatherings on the patio, the DeMotts explain that they are not trying to redesign programming but to facilitate a way for young people to plug into the weekly themes and drill down deeper. They consider Chautauqua a vibrant part of their child raising.

“This community will suck you in,” Miles says. “It’s like a Currier and Ives print, but a summer scene. How do you bottle this stuff and pour it over ice for kids on the patio? That was our question. You know, our kids may or may not want to come here as adults, but the real issue on a larger scale for me is how to keep this place going. These kids are already here. If you build a relationship, they’ll come back.”

“The next generation will and must help define what Chautauqua will be in the future, and these programs give us a chance to experiment and explore together how the Institution can preserve its best and develop new ways of learning and sharing as a community.”

—Megan Sorenson
Assistant Director of the Chautauqua Fund
Youth Writing Camp

As Assistant Director of Education and Director of Special Studies, Teresa Adams is another Chautauquan who has been considering ways to engage youth beyond the Club experience. This year, in addition to the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle Young Readers Program, Adams piloted a Youth Writing Camp that met for full-day sessions in Week Five. Designed and executed with the help of Kathleen Jones, a poet and MFA candidate from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington, the camp offered participants one-on-one attention with professional writers. Chautauqua Theater Company playwright Colin McCenna offered a session called “The World is a Text.” Elysha O’Brien explored fantasy writing, and Sue Weaver had her students prompt an assignment on nature writing. The group also visited the offices of The Chautauquan Daily and selected pieces from their week’s work to be published in a journal created in the UNC-Wilmington publishing lab.

Targeting 12-15 year olds, Adams also organized this year’s Young Scholars Program in which participants attended morning lectures and reconvened to discuss what they’d heard.

“Adult attendees at the morning lecture really noticed those kids sitting together taking notes. In Week One they especially loved Brian Greene’s talk on string theory, Natalie Baralca’s lecture on looking for planets similar to earth, and Kobie Boykins, who discussed the Mars Rover project. After that lecture they wanted to sit closer to the speakers for the following sessions,” says Vice President for Education and Youth Services Sherra Babcock.

Also in Week One, a youth class taught by the 10:45 speaker Kobie Boykins, an engineer at Jet Propulsion Laboratories, demonstrated rocket construction and encouraged youth to practice engineering techniques. Babcock believes these and other learning alternatives for young Chautauquans are key to the Institution’s future.

“It will be a long, slow build,” she says. “But we will lose young people if we don’t reach those intellectually oriented families and children.” What’s needed to expand the program is additional classroom space, funds for equipment and materials, and competitive pay for instructors, she says.

In Week Three, forty Chautauquans between the ages of 17 and 24 joined in a brainstorming project that featured presentations by three innovators associated with Google(s)—the division (headed by Chautauquan Megan Smith) that developed Google Glass and the self-driving car. When it was announced as a Special Studies opportunity, by social media only, “Solve For X” filled immediately.

With these summer gatherings on the patio, the DeMotts explain that they are not trying to redesign programming but to facilitate a way for young people to plug into the weekly themes and drill down deeper. They consider Chautauqua a vibrant part of their child raising.

NOWGEN Planning

Chautauqua’s “NOW Generation” picks up the torch with 20- and 30-somethings with the help of Megan Sorenson, Assistant Director of the Chautauqua Fund. Sorenson is working closely with the newly elected chair of the NOWGEN advisory council, John Haskell, who is joined by vice-chair Ben Sorensen along with Amy Schiller, Russell Bernel, Kelsey Schroeder, Brian Goehring, Mhoire Murphy and Michael Donovan.

“I’m still getting to know this segment of the Chautauqua community,” says Sorenson. “We want this organization to be a meaningful vehicle for communication and engagement.”

According to Sorenson, the NOWGEN group has discussed how to be more welcoming to new visitors in their age cohort, recognizing that many young professionals or families may only be on the grounds for a week and need help knowing how to make the most of their time.

Innovative programming targeted at this age group is also part of the equation. Through a gift from Al and Judy Goldman, participants of the NOW Generation were invited this past season to participate in a three-day seminar during Week Two with Duke University Professor of Psychology and Behavioral Economics Dan Ariely, an event that also included donors. The sessions got rave reviews from participants of all ages.

Additional gatherings for the NOW Generation are being planned in various cities during the off-season. "The next generation will and must help define what Chautauqua will be in the future, and these programs give us a chance to experiment and explore together how the Institution can preserve its best and develop new ways of learning and sharing as a community,” says Sorenson. “Chautauqua is not a passive experience.”

If you have ideas for innovative programming targeting youth and young adults, contact Sorenson at msorenson@ciweb.org. If you would like to help underwrite new opportunities for Special Studies and classes as an alternative to Club, contact Teresa Adams at tadams@ciweb.org. Though program planning for 2014 is nearly complete, ideas for 2015 are still under consideration.
It’s Sunday afternoon, the beginning of Week Five of the 2013 season in which Chautauquans will be exploring “The Pursuit of Happiness.” Jim Pardo has returned from Barbara Lundblad’s sermon at the Sunday service and is on the front porch of his family’s house on Root Avenue.

The yellow, three-story cottage is landscaped with fuschia trees and shade perennials, accent by art objects created in years past by Pardo’s two daughters—Claire, an architect in Atlanta, and Grace, who is in her final year of graduate school at the University of Virginia.

Pardo’s wife, Mary, a Buffalo native, is somewhere inside the rambling house, while Pardo settles himself into a wicker chair to enjoy the breeze off the lake. Like a good Southern gentleman on his day off, Pardo is wearing loafers without socks, a pair of blue seersucker slacks, and a starched, pink, Oxford-cloth shirt. His pale green eyes are intense, glinting with mirth as he explains that he’s decided to take Lundblad’s sermon seriously and sit for much of the week and let happiness pursue him.

Sitting still is probably a good idea. In less than a month, Pardo will assume the chairmanship of Chautauqua’s Board of Trustees.

“I have never spent a full season up here until this year,” he says. The commute from his Atlanta workplace on Friday evenings to join his family here was so frequent in seasons past that he got to know many a Chautauquan as they scrambled to catch rides from the airport to the grounds in the middle of the night after typical travel delays occasioned by summer weather.

This year, however, is different. After more than 30 years of law practice, Pardo has retired from King and Spalding, one of the South’s oldest and largest law firms, with nearly a thousand total attorneys in 20 offices—half overseas and half domestic. His primary work carried him “from one big bankruptcy case to another” as he puts it, helping very large companies restructure to survive and representing creditors seeking to be paid monies owed to them. Coincidentally, Pardo, whose roots are in eastern Virginia and North Carolina, is the third Chautauqua board chair in a row who is a lawyer and has earned at least one degree at the University of Virginia—trains he shares with his predecessors George Snyder and William Clinger. He also is the second to have specialized in bankruptcy law.

“George Snyder and I joke that we hope we never have to put our professional skills to work on behalf of this place,” Pardo smiles and his eyes disappear behind his glasses. Though he’s joking, the navigation of highly pressurized corporate financial disputes surely will stand him in good stead as he brings his talents to bear on an ambitious agenda set in motion by his predecessor who practices law in Pittsburgh.

During his six-year tenure as chair, George Snyder was praised for his calm, democratic approach to an extensive, strategic, community-wide planning process. Small study groups looked hard at Chautauqua’s past and future using a series of new metrics that have better informed overall policy and financial decision-making.

“We are much better now than in the past at capturing and understanding data,” says Pardo, who was appointed as a community member to the board’s asset policy committee in 2004 and then elected trustee in 2006. “Maintaining access by a diverse community, holding down costs, and assuring financial sustainability are the core of our focus. And I have to say that Ron Kirkpatrick [chair of the board’s asset policy committee] has earned grace points for the afterlife with his in-depth work on financial issues. I’ve been on other boards that lacked discipline on finances generally and on capital projects and budgeting in particular. That is not the case here.”

Now Pardo assumes the task of fulfilling the Institution’s current strategic plan, which runs through 2018. He’s leading a high-powered crew of thoughtful business and professional leaders from around the world, including one from Hong Kong, two who live part-time in England, and, as he proudly points out, two others from Atlanta.

Unlike the often-rancorous work of financial restructuring, Pardo says that by watching Chautauqua and its hard-working board, he’s learned more about the good side of people.

He offers high praise for George Snyder’s unfappable demeanor in the face of inevitable conflicts and controversy. Pardo is quick to admit he’s unlikely to bring the same level of equanimity to the board. “I am different than George. I have a different personality. My fuse tends to be a little shorter on a number of issues,” he says.

Pardo anticipates the regular criticism that comes with a leadership role at Chautauqua, but he is clear about the approach he’d like to take: “None of us are perfect or above criticism, but there are different ways to communicate that criticism. I think criticism is most effective when it is quietly communicated in a direct, well-focused, positive, and face-to-face manner. Criticism broadcast publicly, especially when it is done anonymously or with a personal agenda or less than all of the facts, tends to be ineffective in terms of change and becomes little more than the proverbial ‘resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.’”

Pardo’s dislike of Internet blogs and blast emails as a means for Chautauquans to convey displeasure or criticism is practical as well. He sees the use of such technology—including postings labeled as satire and parody—as creating confusion about the Institution for newcomers and those considering a visit. “Chautauqua’s
“After the Games were over,” Pardo says, “we had a family meeting—or as much of a family meeting as is possible with a 7-year-old and her 10-year-old sister—and we asked ourselves if we missed Chautauqua.” The answer was a resounding yes.

In my experience,” Pardo says, “people are committed to the best at Chautauqua, and that includes the best in volunteerism.”

Of the projects ahead or under development, Pardo is particularly excited about the inter-arts collaboration. “It is going to be interesting to see where this project takes us,” he says, noting the enthusiasm that Chautauquans witnessed during the rehearsals for The Romeo & Juliet Project as dancers watched singers who, in turn, were watching actors and actresses. “Nowhere else can you do that. Only here at Chautauqua is that possible.”

Regarding the water quality of the lake, Pardo is realistic, understanding that the Institution by itself does not have the economic wherewithal to make it right. “But we are in the best position to follow best practices and to set an example for all of the other lakeside communities and constituencies to follow,” he says.

He also is looking forward to the rehabilitation of the Amphitheater, which will take place under his watch. He sees potential there for increasing both the number of participants in the Chautauqua community and the sense of community surrounding the Chautauqua experience.

“I don’t think we’ve hit the capacity of Chautauqua,” he says. “Maybe in a single day, but there is certainly room to drive volume through programming and grow both the number of participants and the related revenue from operations.”

About the building plans, Pardo is visibly passionate. “We need to use the Amphitheater rehabilitation as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to instill a sense of community around a common goal and high-profile project. Simply put, the Amp is the physical and iconic center of the Institution, and it needs to be rehabilitated and everyone needs to participate in that effort.” Pardo says he recognizes that the Institution needs several more lead gifts for this project to move forward. “And once all those lead gifts are in place,” he says, “then we will need community-wide financial support at all levels for the project to be successful and for the rehabilitated Amp to be properly endowed to ensure that it can and will remain the center of the Chautauqua experience for generations to come. To waste that opportunity for the greater Chautauqua community—with appropriate recognition—to reaffirm its support of the Institution in that manner would just be unthinkable.”

Noting the trends toward one- or two-week visits, Pardo still believes that the magic of Chautauqua will prevail going forward. “The data show that families are coming for shorter stays. But first-time visitors take 30-some kids into a group and turn those disparate masses of youth into communities—it is amazing! Kids love it now as much as ours did when they were children. Where else can you get that?”

The Pardo family came to Chautauqua for the first time in the early 1990s at the invitation of a good friend. Their daughters were entranced, particularly with the independence and freedom they had. Mary and Jim loved the proximity to Buffalo, which enabled her parents to visit them on the grounds. The family became annual and rented various houses for longer and longer stays until the summer of 1996, when they stayed home in Atlanta for the Centennial Summer Olympic Games.

“After the Games were over,” Pardo says, “we had a family meeting—or as much of a family meeting as is possible with a 7-year-old and her 10-year-old sister—and we asked ourselves if we missed Chautauqua.” The answer was a resounding yes. They returned in 1997, bought the house on Root in 1998, renovated it, and moved in the following year.

Pardo is mindful that he is unlike other board chairs who have had a much longer connection to Chautauqua. Most started as children themselves in Club. But Pardo has made up for lost time. He religiously attends the 10:45 lectures and Sunday services—“the best tens Sundays of preaching you’ll find anywhere,” he says. He reads a smattering of CLSC books each year, and this season, he has tried “to relocate” his tennis game.

His plans for retirement include taking the first eight months of the year off. In the future, there might be other opportunities, “I like children,” he says, “including college and grad school students.” In the past Pardo has lectured or taught as an adjunct at various law schools and found himself buoyed by the students’ enthusiasm. Once the charm of so much free time has worn off, he may find himself at the front of a classroom. But there are also his major responsibilities with Chautauqua.

“In my experience,” he says, “people are committed to the best at Chautauqua, and that includes the best in volunteerism. We will continue to do the things we do really well with a focus on sustainability in the broadest sense. It’s going to be a good run.”
Jack Connolly has invested his time, talents, and treasure in Chautauqua Institution throughout his life. His latest gift—a sizeable, unrestricted bequest to the Institution’s endowment—comes in addition to the IRA he signed over to Chautauqua after his wife, Marcia, who loved Chautauqua dearly, passed away five years ago. “That IRA was for her, and when she was gone, Chautauqua came next,” he explains.

Connolly says his approach to giving has always been thoughtful and measured. “We started like most Chautauquans,” he explains. “In our thirties we made smaller gifts to the annual fund and continued to be more active as time went on. Of course a gift to the Chautauqua Fund is spent immediately for operations and then it’s gone. So next comes the capital gift—something for bricks and mortar or endowment that will last much longer. The third option is planned giving. At this point in life, after you’ve made your best efforts to take care of yourself and your family’s long-term needs, it’s time to think about what you can contribute to help ensure real sustainability.”

Jack shrugs off any praise for his ongoing generosity to the Institution and says it all comes down to the fact that “Chautauqua is part of me.” But this savvy businessman is also quick to point out that he has watched the Institution evolve over the years and has never felt better about its prospects.

“For the first time,” he muses, “I think Chautauqua is really sustainable. The foundation is running its investments well. [President] Tom Becker has made some tough decisions while working hard to improve the season’s program. And he’s made huge reductions in expenses. There was a time when we were spending more money than we could afford. I watched a renaissance begin as Becker came into office.”

Jack Connolly’s roots in the region run deep and his observations of the Institution go back to childhood. His mother’s family, the Cornells, began farming in Chautauqua County in the 1850s, even before the Institution was established. Though Jack was born in Washington, DC, his father moved the family to Prendergast Point on the lake during World War II, believing that his wife and children would be safer in western New York during such unpredictable times.

Like his mother and her two brothers before him, Connolly attended the old Chautauqua Central School, on the other side of Route 394. His family participated in summer programming at the Institution, and Jack even played in the Chautauqua youth symphony in the 7th and 8th grades, but his favorite time of year was the off-season when the gates stayed opened and he and his friends could freely ride their bikes onto the grounds.

“We’d fly down those steep concrete slopes in the empty Amphitheater,” Connolly says, “pedaling as fast as we could. The benches at the bottom were in storage, so we tried to go fast enough to coast back up the other side. It’s a wonder we didn’t kill ourselves.” He laughs. “My memory is that it was dark, wet, and moldy in there, and about half the lights that ringed the Amp were out.”

The manager of the St. Elmo also allowed Connolly and his buddies to play pool with impunity in the old hotel in the off-season.

When his family finally moved back east—this time to Fairfax, Virginia—Connolly headed off to prep school at Mercersburg Academy in Pennsylvania. He returned to Chautauqua every summer through high school and college and was the tennis instructor at the Institution in the 1950s.

Connolly met Marcia Heintzelman during his first year at Harvard. They dated all four years and married two weeks after their graduation in 1958. Marcia, originally from South Bend, Indiana, had never been to Chautauqua, but she quickly came to love the community as much as her husband. She was particularly devoted to the Chautauqua Opera.

The couple’s children, Melissa and John III, were born in the early 1960s, and the family continued to visit family every summer on the grounds. In 1973 they bought the house at 15 Hurst—a classic cottage to which they added wings and a bountiful garden.

The yard, porch, and interior are decorated with frogs throughout so that the place has come to be known by many Chautauquans as “The Frog Cottage.” Connolly’s grandchildren and other young visitors are regularly invited to attempt an accurate count of every frog on the premises, which is complicated by the masses of jumping amphibians on the wallpaper in one of the bathrooms.
During his business career, Connolly spent 18 years in the consumer goods industry with firms that included Miles Laboratories, Gillette, and Ocean Spray. Then, in 1978, he joined The Center for Management Research in Wellesley, Massachusetts, as majority stockholder and chairman. Over the years the organization grew and established partnerships with major universities and research centers to provide management and leadership training for the executives of organizations around the world. Meanwhile, Marcia served as Associate Director of Admissions for Harvard and Radcliffe colleges before her retirement in 1996.

Connolly and his father, John Sr., got involved with the Chautauqua Golf Club in the 1970s and Jack’s father was instrumental in securing a new watering system as the course expanded. “My dad liked to keep his money close at hand,” Jack grins. “But he was definitely a dedicated volunteer.”

Like her husband and father-in-law, Marcia Connolly also dug in as a volunteer. She served as president of the Chautauqua Property Owners Association and was on the Board of Trustees from 1990–1998. “Then I followed her on the board for another eight years,” Jack says. When he was asked to serve as chair of the Chautauqua Fund Campaign in 2001, Connolly agreed to the task only if he and Marcia could do it together as co-chairs, setting a new precedent. “It was a whole new image of what the annual fund leadership looked like,” he explains.

The couple’s complementary skills worked well. “I approached the job as a marketing and business challenge,” Jack says, “and Marcia took a generational approach.” They chaired the fund through 2005.

In 2008, to honor his wife’s love and dedication to the Chautauqua Opera, Jack and his children provided a major capital gift to renovate what had been called the Summer School Dorm, used by opera students. Now virtually new and uptitled with many amenities, the building is named Connolly Residence Hall. The family also created an endowment for the building’s upkeep in perpetuity.

Connolly’s philanthropic activities have not been limited to Chautauqua, however. He was chair of his 25th reunion at Harvard Business School. He has also been a consistent donor to Mercersburg, his beloved prep school in Pennsylvania. “But you know,” he says, “Harvard has an endowment in excess of $35 billion. They don’t need my little bit of money. I have been pleased to spend my life at Chautauqua, and I know that philanthropy here makes a huge difference.”

Though he spends the winter in Boynton Beach, Florida, Chautauqua is still Connolly’s first priority and his summers on the grounds are full. For the last 20 years, daughter Melissa Orlov and her husband, George, have lived around the corner on McClintock. Now Jack spends most of his time in the company of his partner Peg Barrett, a retired physical education teacher originally from Niagara, N.Y. “She keeps me hopping with tennis, golf, and exercise,” he says. He is also a devoted member of Chautauqua’s Thursday Morning Brass group and a volunteer for the Chautauqua Fund, regularly sharing his passion for the place with newcomers.

“Volunteerism is at the heart of Chautauqua,” Connolly says. “Volunteers make things work here.” He specifically remembers making a fundraising call on an elderly minister and his wife some years ago. The visit lasted an hour. At the end, the couple decided to increase their annual gift from fifty to a hundred dollars. “And that was a big amount for them,” Connolly says, “I wrote them a long thank you letter, because a stretch gift is the most meaningful.”

Connolly is cognizant of the lifestyle changes that have required the Institution to adapt to new realities. Contemporary, two-career families must negotiate vacation time alongside their children’s sports and other activities, while also saving for the astronomical college tuitions in their futures. These factors often put a full season at Chautauqua out of reach for many.

Still, Connolly says, no matter how long the stay or whether you are a property owner or a renter, giving to Chautauqua should be a priority. “We have a thousand homeowners—but only half of them are donors,” he says with some frustration. “Those who give understand that the market value of their real estate is directly tied to the quality of the program the Institution produces. And that quality is tied to philanthropy. Those who say their taxes are their contribution to Chautauqua are missing this point.”

For renters, Connolly continues, the case for a giving is perhaps a little less obvious. “Keeping the gate price lower is what enables our diversity. The musicians, preachers, and teachers must be able to continue coming here. We don’t want to lose those folks by raising the price of admission. The annual Chautauqua Fund is critical in that equation.”

As the current Vice Chair of the Chautauqua Foundation, which allows him to take on special assignments at the request of Chairman Steve Percy, Connolly says he has been struck lately by how Chautauqua continues to become more distinctive, more unusual in a global context. “And because of that, we all have to be thinking about Chautauqua’s sustainability. Twenty percent of the annual budget of the Institution depends on the productivity of the endowment and contributions to the Chautauqua Fund.”

As he reflects on the value of Chautauqua over a lifetime, Connolly returns to the enormous sense of emotional satisfaction he’s experienced in volunteering and, most recently, in making a planned gift. “In the final analysis, when I had taken care of everything I wanted to do for my family, it was easy to decide to put something in the kitty for Chautauqua. Sustainability only happens over a long time—that’s what the planned gift does best,” he says. “I wish more Chautauquans would consider it.”

“At this point in life, after you’ve made your best efforts to take care of yourself and your family’s long-term needs, it’s time to think about what you can contribute to help ensure real sustainability.”

—Jack Connolly
This project was made possible through the generosity of the following individuals:

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Marty Merkley is on the back porch of the Amp. It’s Sunday, the first day of Week Five—the week in which all of the performing arts programs at Chautauqua will combine forces to present the first, inter-arts collaboration in the Institution’s history. The production of The Romeo & Juliet Project, co-curated by CTC Artistic Director Vivienne Benesch and her Juilliard faculty colleague David Paul, will draw upon the CSO, the Young Artists of the Chautauqua Opera Company, the North Carolina Dance Theatre and Chautauqua Festival Dancers, musicians from the MSFO, members of the School of Music’s Voice Program, and the Chautauqua Theater Company with guest artists.

The bold project was first proposed by President Tom Becker as a means to showcase Chautauqua’s unique capacity for collaboration and creativity. Vivienne Benesch agreed to direct the production and lead the departmental collaboration. Just six days before the only performance and world premier of the piece, Merkley admits that he hasn’t had a chance to follow what’s happening with the project because he’s been wrangling all the details involved in making the rest of the Institution’s full menu of arts programming run smoothly.

Week Four, he explains, was the biggest of the 2013 season thus far with a brilliant concert by Alexander Gravelyuk performing Rachmaninoff’s Third Piano Concerto with the Chautauqua Symphony Orchestra, a piece which Merkley explains, “is the hardest for a pianist and orchestra to pull off, and they did it with only two rehearsals.”

Audiences in Week Four also responded enthusiastically to chamber music, an outstanding production of Peter Grimes by the Chautauqua Opera Company, and a raise-the-roof Friday performance by country music singer Travis Tritt, who unexpectedly invited his daughter on stage to sing with him. The audience was thrilled.

“All this,” says Merkley, “and it was a hundred degrees on stage every night from Tuesday to Friday. We are not used to that kind of heat here.”

This afternoon Merkley has just come from a memorial service for Flora MacKenzie, the late wife of Ross MacKenzie Chautauqua’s first full-time director of the Department of Religion. As the celebrants assembled in the Hall of Philosophy, a different flavor of music from the Thursday Morning Brass was wafting over from the CLSC Alumni Association’s annual Great American Picnic held on the lawn of Alumni Hall.

“That’s Chautauqua,” says Merkley, grinning. “One thing runs into the next. I’m sure Flora would have loved it.”

NOW Merkley is overseeing a concert by participants in the New York State Summer School of the Arts School of Choral Studies from SUNY Fredonia. The parents of one of the young performers on stage interrupt his musings. They are searching for the restrooms. He directs them. All in a day’s work.

“We do in nine weeks what most arts programs do in nine months,” Merkley says. “A week’s work in a day, is what it feels like.” In addition to The Romeo & Juliet Project, Week Five will also involve rehearsals of the next opera, Falstaff, which opens Friday night. “And the Dance program will present its student recital Monday night, followed by the professional company Tuesday night.” Of The Romeo & Juliet Project, Merkley says “I can only say I’ll be there Saturday night with other Chautauquans to see the performance. It will be exciting.” And with that, Merkley leaves to check on the pizza and salad to be served to the young performers when they finish their concert at four o’clock.

Crossing Boundaries

By Tuesday night some tired-looking people are quietly assembling in the theater seats of the old Central High School, where the Chautauqua Opera Company often holds rehearsals. But the group assembled tonight is associated with the Chautauqua Theater Company. They come in bearing backpacks and balancing canned drinks and plastic clamshells in their hands. It will be a quick dinner of salads, pasta, and sandwiches. Some sit down to eat, napkins in laps, wielding a plastic fork in one hand while checking e-mail on a cell phone with the other.

“With all the extra time you have right now, I’d like for you all to chew instead of gulp and swallow,” says Peter Francis James, a Yale drama instructor, frequent television actor, and seasoned Shakespearean who is playing Capulet in this production. His wry comment gets a few nods.

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All the participants in the project are working double time, fitting this task around their other responsibilities in the regular CTC season.

Across the gym, sitting on top of a sturdy table set out on the hardwood floor, Rebecca Guy—who will play...
"Isn’t it lovely to imagine Shakespeare, Gounod, Bernstein and Prokofiev with their arms around each other’s shoulders, striding down the Chautauqua brick path in the night?"

—an audience member’s grateful e-mail to Vivienne Benesch after the performance, as reported in American Theatre magazine

Juliet’s Nurse—is moving between yoga poses and leg lifts to warm up. Then Viv Benesch comes in, wearing a T-shirt and sweat pants, and suddenly the energy in the room lifts. After conferring with the production stage manager James Latus, a Broadway veteran, she calls the group to order.

“Alright y’all,” Benesch says, “we are when the music begins, it’s as if a Juliet’s Nurse—is moving between yoga poses and leg lifts to warm up. Then Viv Benesch comes in, wearing a T-shirt and sweat pants, and suddenly the energy in the room lifts. After conferring with the production stage manager James Latus, a Broadway veteran, she calls the group to order.

“Alright y’all,” Benesch says, “we are going to play a little game tonight to begin. It may work. It may not. Since as actors you can only speak your parts, tonight is your chance to do a few scenes as song and dance. You may feel silly. You may feel silly...”

Some of the actors groan. Others try to comprehend. Some are clearly game for this chance to break out and try on what their counterparts from the dance program and the voice department are bringing to this collaborative performance.

As Benesch has conceived this production, a number of the key roles will be played in triplicate—by an actor, a singer, and a dancer—each taking an interpretive turn with the essential scenes of the tragedy. Since each set of performers is rehearsing separately, Benesch’s strategy is to encourage these actors to experience what their counterparts are bringing to the roles.

When the music begins, it’s as if a switch has been flicked, and the characters take their places and begin singing, laughing, hammering it up. Mercutio, played by Peter Mark Mathis, set up a special website for the Romeo & Juliet Project to document the learning, as Ewalt sees it, will be helpful over the next two inter-arts collaborations that are planned—a production on the American West in 2014 and Carmina Burana in 2015. Ewalt believes documenting the learning and reporting on this year’s venture will help attract additional outside coverage—perhaps from public television and reviewers from other media outlets.

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The technical rehearsal for the show involves preparing for the multiple entries and exits of a giant chorus and a matrix of cues for lights, sound, and stage props. The crew will keep a rehearsal schedule from midnight to 4 a.m. on Wednesday and Thursday. In addition, the team must practice their tasks very quietly in the Amp so as not to disturb sleeping Chautauquans. The tech crew will whisper into headsets from backstage, communicating with the lighting crew in a booth high above the seats and the stage manager and audio technicians at the sound board on the floor of the Amp.

Before the rehearsal is over, a costume is delivered for CTC’s Juliet (Arielle Goldman). She dashes into a corner to pull it on and returns, beaming in the buttery yellow fabric. The fit is perfect. She glows.

Extreme Measures

More than 150 cast members of this enormous production have been working in various rehearsal spaces around the grounds on a schedule that rivals the complexity of a NASA launch. The first read-through by the performers took place only two weeks before the performance. The Chautauqua Symphony will not see the show until dress rehearsal. The Chautauqua Project’s production of Clybourne Park has already sold out, and then there’s the late night radio play the company has put together for Tuesday night. Meanwhile, everyone is scrambling off to the R&J rehearsals that have been fitted around their regular responsibilities.

Certainly for Ewalt and his young staff who produce a newspaper six days a week for nine weeks nonstop, there has been a kind of instant camaraderie and empathy with their arts colleagues. “We want to tap into the enthusiasm and frustration that this kind of extra undertaking creates,” Ewalt says. “It needs to be a learning experience for everyone.”

At the end of the season, senior staff will look at whether this undertaking met the strategic goals and how strong the collaborative work was. “And we’ll be asking ourselves if it really did tell the story of the arts at Chautauqua. Did we come out of our programmatic silos and make something worthy at Chautauqua? This is about so much more than just one night at the Amp,” Ewalt explains.

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Chautauqua’s webmaster, Leslie Mathis, set up a special website for the Romeo & Juliet Project to which Ewalt’s staff has added stories and videos. The Daily’s first-ever multimedia editor, Andrew Mitchell, followed rehearsals and recorded video interviews with the various artistic directors and performers as the show was being mounted.

In particular, Chautauquans (and the Daily staff) were charmed by the story of North Carolina Dance Theatre veterans Anna Gerberich and Frederick (Pete) Leo Walker II who met at Chautauqua in 2010 and danced together in the company before their first date in 2012. They went for ice cream at Boxcar Barney’s, and the magic of that evening and the romance that followed helped to inspire their performances as Romeo and Juliet. As reviewer David Shengold, writing for the Daily, put it, “the ‘dancing’ Romeo and Juliet proved the most eloquent, offering the three principal Prokofiev pas de deux (as rendered by Jean Pierre Bonnefoux) with athleticism and tensile strength overlaid with a seeming spontaneity that evoked youthful passion and despair.”

see R&J Project on p12
Traffic of Our Stage

Vivienne Benesch, who is surrounded with minutes to spare, Supreme. When the gates finally open, the Amp easily fills to capacity, and wearing a glossy black raincoat and was not planned to be used. More than an hour before the (a speaker in Week Six) comes in behind the stage, a seating area that forms at the back of the Amp. It begins to drizzle, and the ushers bring out programs for patrons to hold over their heads while they wait. When the gates finally open, the scramble for seats begins.

The Amp easily fills to capacity, and a ring of umbrellas encircles the edge of the building. Despite the persistent rain, Chautauquans begin seating themselves in the bleachers at the back, and finally the ushers take a line of patrons to the choir loft behind the stage, a seating area that was not planned to be used.

With minutes to spare, Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg (a speaker in Week Six) comes in wearing a glossy black raincoat and flanked by several U.S. marshals. She sits a couple of rows behind Vivienne Benesch, who is surrounded by conservatory actors who are high-fiving and hugging and reaching across the benches to offer pats on the back and waving at other actors amid the babble. Members of the audience can’t help but wonder at so much effort for a single performance, what tension must be humming in the hearts of the actors, singers and dancers for their one moment to shine upcoming. Even in the last rehearsals, some elements of the show were cut. The complex choreography of so many performers had the show running long.

Jean Pierre Bonnefoux comes out from backstage where he was offering good wishes and encouragement to his dancers. He greets Marlena Malas, chair of the Chautauqua Voice Department, with a kiss and a warm embrace in the aisle. Patricia McBride waves him to their seats. Marty Merkley is standing high in the back of the Amp, helping to identify empty seats for the last folks coming in. President Tom Becker makes his way through the charting crowds toward the stage. He will introduce the production.

The stage itself is outfitted with minimal props. There are dozens of bright red, straight-back chairs set about. Movible white benches lit from within are lined up across the back. A translucent screen, intriguingly lit from behind, fronts a wrought iron balcony at the rear of the stage. The rain outside continues, roaring like applause.

Suddenly Jay Lesenger, the artistic director of Chautauqua Opera Company, is sprinting up the aisle toward Benesch. He is carrying a doll-sized red chair in the palm of his hand. When he reaches her, he presents it to her, and the long journey to this moment seems palpable. They embrace, her blond curls shaking over her shoulder. This is, finally, the picture of collaboration. As the lights dim, only the artists can say what it really takes to make such magic happen.

“Where else but Chautauqua could such a feat have been attempted, let alone brought off? Even The Juilliard School (to which many of the artists involved have ties) has neither the institutional structure nor an appropriate venue for preparing and presenting such an ambitious, large-scale venture.”

—Philadelphia-based arts critic and guest reviewer David Shengold The Chautauquan Daily

“We are very much at the peak of our collaborative effort. As the lights dim, only the artists can say what it really takes to make such magic happen. The potential for success in such an ambitious approach was slim, given how easy it would be to get bogged down in the wealth of material and how difficult to transition from one art form to the next. But across three hours of graceful dance and music punctuated where necessary by Shakespeare’s starry-eyed language, Benesch and her many gifted collaborators pulled it off.”

—Colin Dabkowski The Buffalo News

“Where else but Chautauqua could such a feat have been attempted, let alone brought off? Even The Juilliard School (to which many of the artists involved have ties) has neither the institutional structure nor an appropriate venue for preparing and presenting such an ambitious, large-scale venture.”

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“Our doomed young lovers come in three sets: Yujoong Kim and Rachel Sterrenberg from Chautauqua Music Festival’s Voice Program, Brian Smolin and Arielle Goldman from Chautauqua Theater Company, and Pete Walker and Anna Gerberich from North Carolina Dance Theatre. The effect is almost that of each character’s personalities; the singers convey strength and assurance in their love, while the dancers are more tender and affectionate. All six are remarkable, but Smolin and Goldman especially spark when together, discovering nuances in the oft-quoted text and infusing believable teen passion into their physical choices.”

—Dallas-based writer and guest reviewer Lindsey Wilson The Chautauquan Daily

Address Service Requested
PO Box 28
Chautauqua, New York 14722
Chautauqua Institution