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SKyPAC unveils plaque honoring Buchanan

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Warren County Judge-Executive Mike Buchanan stands beside the commemorative plaque at the Southern Kentucky Performing Arts Center on Wednesday, Oct. 27, 2021, during the unveiling ceremony. (Grace Ramey)

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Buchanan honored for securing funding for SKyPAC's survival

Mike Buchanan gave up on his dream of a career as an artist decades ago. The arts in Bowling Green are better for it.

Buchanon switched his major from art to business while at Western Kentucky University about 50 years ago, and that decision helped put him in position to not only help create but rescue from possible extinction the city's premier fine arts facility.

Warren County judge-executive for the past 28 years, Buchanon on Wednesday was honored for his role in establishing the Southern Kentucky Performing Arts Center that opened in 2012 and that he was instrumental in reviving from its pandemic-induced financial problems last year.

Jeff Reed, president and chief executive of the Arts of Southern Kentucky organization that oversees SKyPAC, unveiled a bronze plaque bearing Buchanan's likeness that is now displayed near the entrance to the 1,800-seat venue on College Street.

The plaque joins one unveiled in June displaying the likeness of former state Rep. Jody Richards, who was instrumental in procuring the \$6.77 million state appropriation for SKyPAC's planning and design.

Buchanon was also involved in SKyPAC's planning stages and has since worked through Warren Fiscal Court to rescue the performance venue from some life-threatening financial straits.

"Today's recognition is long overdue, in my opinion," Reed said. "It's not a stretch to say that these doors wouldn't be open today without Judge Buchanon's support."

Reed pointed out that Wednesday was the first anniversary of the creation of the ASK organization formed as a merger of SKyPAC and Orchestra Kentucky, two organizations that were in crisis at the time.

At Buchanon's urging, fiscal court allocated \$750,000 in Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security

Act funds to SKyPAC to help jumpstart ASK.

More recently, fiscal court approved the lease of the county-owned Capitol Arts Center to the Warren County Public Library in a move that provided another boost for SKyPAC.

The agreement between fiscal court and the library’s board allows ASK to lease the Capitol from the county for \$5 per year and sublease the 20,000-square-foot building to the library for \$400,000 annually.

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Such support was nothing short of life-saving for SKyPAC, according to ASK Chairperson Beth Sigler.

“When we couldn’t have shows or sell sponsorships (because of the pandemic), we had to lay off staff,” Sigler said. “It put us in a very bad spot. Judge Buchanan reached out to us, and he was instrumental in helping us chart a new path forward.”

Because of fiscal court’s financial assistance and the formation of ASK, Sigler said SKyPAC is now on sound footing.

“We’re in very solid position,” she said. “We’re doing better than we had anticipated.”

Warren County First District Magistrate Doug Gorman, who is also chairman of the Downtown Economic Development Authority, said the support of SKyPAC is just one example of how Buchanan has contributed to Warren County’s rapid growth.

“This facility (SKyPAC) has transformed our community,” Gorman said. “Judge Buchanan has supported the arts his entire life, and

he understands that quality of life is so vitally important to the growth of a community.”

Buchanon agreed, saying many industrial prospects look at the quality of schools and entertainment opportunities when deciding where to locate.

“I’m a huge supporter of the arts and always have been,” he said. “SKyPAC is truly a gift to our community, and I’m proud to have been a small part of it.

“I’m thankful for this recognition, but I’m a bit embarrassed because so many people have played a role.”

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