

Constitution Center upgrading its Kimmel Theater and show

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On Tuesday, the National Constitution Center will close its Sidney Kimmel Theater for the first phase of an overhaul of both the theater and the live production *Freedom Rising*, the center's multimedia centerpiece.

On Feb. 9, the theater will reopen, only to close again from April 14 to June 12.

When it reopens the week of June 13 - in time for the Democratic National Convention, convening here in July - theater and production will be completely upgraded, both technologically and thematically, said Jeffrey Rosen, center president and chief executive.

The refurbishment and upgrade have been made possible by a \$2 million grant from the Sidney Kimmel Foundation and \$1 million in matching funds from an anonymous donor, Rosen said.

"It's the first time the theater and *Freedom Rising* have been completely updated since they opened" on July 4, 2003, Rosen said.

There was a "modest upgrade" in 2008 to the performance, which features a live actor and multimedia visuals.

Most of the imminent renovation will involve upgrades to the theater's technology - high-definition imagery and state-of-the-art lighting will enhance the production, Rosen said.

Freedom Rising is a 17-minute production that - with patriotic fanfare - takes visitors on "a whirlwind journey through more than 200 years of constitutional history," according to the center's website. Rosen said there would be some scholarly tinkering with the story, but most of the effort is aimed at theater technology.

Rosen likes to bill the production as "the longest-running show in Philadelphia," which indeed it is.

Freedom Rising has been performed well more than 50,000 times before nearly eight million visitors, according to the Constitution Center. The production has also toured to Washington, where it was presented at the White House in 2008.

The upgrades will allow the Kimmel Theater to offer a wider range of events, including the center's Town Hall public program series and debates, museum programs, and other special events, Rosen said.

Sidney Kimmel is no stranger to giving to the Constitution Center. He first contributed \$5 million to construction of the building. In a statement, he said that he believed "it is important at this stage in the National Constitution Center's life to keep the space and content relevant now and in the future."

Rosen said he wanted the theater and the Constitution Center to become a hub of related activity during the Democratic convention.

"We hope to be the center of debates, celebrations, and educational activities - centered at the Kimmel," he said.

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