

## New Theater Named After Bankhead Family



Nancy (left) and Evelyn Bankhead stand in front of the performing arts theater that will be named for their family.

Livermore's new performing arts theater has a name: the Bankhead Theater.

The naming was announced this week by the Livermore Valley Performing Arts Center (LVPAC), the organization that runs the theater. Now nearing completion, the theater is scheduled to open in late September.

The Evelyn Bankhead family has donated \$1.5 million to the project, a naming gift that lifts the fund-raising near its \$15 million goal.

The naming recognizes more than the \$1.5 million gift, observed Phil Wente, LVPAC board chairman. He said the Bankheads have contributed enormously to Livermore's agricultural and arts traditions; theirs is a fitting name to adorn the new theater.

"We are particularly pleased that this gift comes from a long-time Livermore ranching family," said Wente, "for it underscores both the vision for the performing arts center and the arts and culture traditions of Livermore that the theater is designed to serve and showcase.

"Receiving this gift, three months prior to our grand opening, provides us with a tremendous boost toward the completion of our capital campaign," he said.

Speaking for the Bankheads, Nancy Bankhead said the family feels it's "an honor" to be a part of a fine new theater like this. "We've gotten so much from the community over the years. This provides an opportunity to give something back.

"We believe in the performing arts center," said Nancy. "The activities that will be supported in the new theater are things my mom has always enjoyed. We are thrilled to help provide the funding to realize this long-time community dream."

The Bankheads' Livermore roots go back to World War II when Evelyn, a native of San Francisco, came to teach at Fifth Street School. She remembers huge class sizes from those days. She taught a fourth grade class with 65 students.

She left teaching after five years to raise a family with her husband Armand. Their five sons and one daughter were all born in town at Saint Paul's Hospital. Two of them, Nancy and Malcolm, still live in Livermore. The family also includes 21 grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren.

The family moved to rural Fallon Road in the 1950s, where they raised cattle and sheep. The ranch was in an area that is now undergoing urbanization as part of the East Dublin development. The family still ranches, now out of a spread on Hartman Road in North Livermore.

"We don't like city living all that much," Nancy explained. "We like to go to the city, you know, for shopping and events once in awhile, but when it comes to a place to live, our heart is still in the country."

The family supports the efforts to preserve North Livermore as an agricultural area. Nancy has been crusading to save the heritage trees that line North Livermore Avenue. She points out they were planted as a gift to Livermore some 117 years ago.

In addition to these agricultural activities, the family has been active in the arts since their matriarch, Evelyn, first arrived in the Valley to teach. She was an officer of the Livermore Valley Concert Society and a founder of the Livermore Cultural Arts Council. Evelyn, who turned 90 this year, still attends the meetings of the arts council. She's also a member of the Livermore Valley Lithophiles.

The theater is the product of a partnership between LVPAC and City of Livermore. It will seat 500 persons. An 1800-seat regional theater where nationally renowned touring entertainers will be showcased is also planned. Construction is proposed to begin next year.

The Bankhead Theater will serve as home to a number of Valley performing arts groups, including Del Valle Fine Arts, Livermore Valley Opera, Pleasanton Playhouse, Livermore-Amador Symphony, Valley Dance Theatre, Cantabella Children's Chorus and Valley Concert Chorale.

The ribbon cutting is slated for Saturday, September 29. The first performance, by The Four Freshmen, will follow on October 1, followed by two weeks of non-stop shows.

It's anticipated there will be more than 120 events at the Bankhead Theater during its 2007-08 inaugural season. A season schedule will be released in August.

Incidentally, as a name, Bankhead goes well with a theater. It's a Scottish name that refers to the headwaters of a stream ("bank" is the bank of a stream).