



A Little Bit of *paradise*

By Christine Bernier Lienke

Photos courtesy of the Paradise Center for the Arts

In the quaint city of Faribault, Minnesota, located just 45 miles north of Albert Lea, you'll find one of the grandest stops on any day-tripper path – the Paradise Center for the Arts. The Paradise is Faribault's newly renovated cultural gem and home to the Bahl Family Auditorium, a 320-seat performance theater offering live performances including plays and concerts. The center also encompasses the Carlander Family Art Gallery featuring burgeoning and established artists, a gift shop filled with one-of-a-kind creations and the center also offers a wide array of art classes for young and old. Nestled among Faribault's bustling business district, the Paradise's new marquee makes it easy to spot on Central Avenue.



Top: Paradise Auditorium 1929
Bottom: Paradise theater historic exterior

Faribault's motto "Small Town Pride with Big City Opportunities" is certainly true in the case of this beautifully renovated art center. Built in 1929 on the site of the former Faribault Opera House, the Paradise served the Faribault region for more than 60 years hosting stage performances and movies. The theater closed in the late 1980s under pressure from more modern, multiplex theaters built in the region. In 2005, members of the Faribault Area Community Theatre and the Faribault Art Center, led by current Paradise President Matt Drevlow, started a project to resurrect the space and once again bring theater and art culture to the residents and visitors of Faribault.

The Paradise, which opened its doors to classes, art exhibits and gift sales in March 2007 and held a grand opening of the Bahl Family Auditorium in October 2007, is now in its final stages of renovation. In the interest of historic preservation, the lobby of the Paradise still boasts three original balconies and the main theater contains much of the original facades, but now also includes state-of-the-art light and sound systems.▶



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At center stage of this amazing venue is Tami Oachs, executive director of the Paradise Center for the Arts. Oachs believes the art center will keep the city of Faribault as well as the southern Minnesota region a strong, artistically diverse community. In addition to Oachs' extensive experience in project management, fundraising and marketing, she is also an accomplished potter, sculptor and metal artist.

"At the Paradise, we offer the latest technology in a historic venue," Oachs says. "We have ties to the past, but are looking toward a new groundbreaking future. In the past two years, I've been privileged to work with an incredible group of people – mostly volunteers – to make the Paradise into what we feel is the most beautiful and unique regional art center around."

Recent offerings at the Paradise included a show by the Kenny and Amanda Smith Band – a Grammy-nominated national bluegrass act from Virginia. On tap in October is a theater performance called "Lend Me a Tenor" written by Ken Ludwig. Later in the month, festive Halloween events will take place to include a viewing of the movie "Young Frankenstein." In the upcoming 2009 season, Oachs has plans to offer a schedule filled with movies, including art and independent films for adults, and children's movies. ▶



Left: The Art Center gift store.

Right: Tami Oachs, executive director of the Paradise Center for the Arts. Photo by Paul Swenson Photography

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Any day trip or weekend getaway to Faribault's Paradise Center for the Arts would not be complete without stopping at these hotspots along Faribault's business district on or near Central Avenue:

Where to eat:

Dusek's Bakery – 223 Central Avenue North

A true hometown bakery offering the best in freshly baked pastries, cakes, doughnuts and much more.

Gran Plaza – 520 Central Avenue North

One of the newest restaurants in Faribault offering delectable Mexican fare.

JavaLive – 313 Central Avenue North

A cozy, delicious deli/coffeeshop atmosphere offering homemade sandwiches, soups and a smooth cup of joe.

Sweet Spot – 209 Central Avenue

www.sweetspotcandies.net

A great end to the day with a variety of ice cream and treats for the sweet tooth with efficient, friendly service.

Where to shop:

Central Avenue Bookstore – 229 Central Avenue North

www.centralavenuebooks.com

A perfect stop for a quick read, bestseller and historic books about Faribault or Minnesota.

Crafty Maven – 212A Central Avenue North

Filled with an eclectic array of new and old creative items.

Creating A Ruckus – 220 Central Avenue North

www.creatingaruckus.com

An upscale boutique with custom jewelry, funky clothing and creative gifts.

The Nook and Cranny – 412 Central Avenue

www.thenookandcranny.net

Unique treasures made by local artisans. Rejuvenate in the Garden Bistro with a cup of tea.

Where to stay:

Historic Hutchinson House

305 Second Street Northwest

www.historichutchhouse.com

Located just three blocks from historic downtown Faribault, this Queen Anne Victorian home is listed on the National Register of Historical Places.

Vintage Suites

129 Central Avenue North

www.vintageballroom.com

Apartment-like suites in a beautifully historic building.



The Paradise is open to visitors Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and during events and performances. Stop in to enjoy the latest art exhibit, purchase a piece of art from the gallery or take home a sentimental item from the gift shop. Consider extending your day trip to stay the weekend to enjoy a play or take in a film. The Paradise Center for the Arts is located at 321 Central Avenue North, Faribault, Minnesota. For more information about the Paradise, go to www.paradisecenterforthearts.org. *W*

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