

# The arts on Cape Ann in 2014

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A work from Ruth Mordecai's Container series. Courtesy Photo



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**By Keith Powers**  
**Arts correspondent**

Posted Jan. 2, 2015 @ 10:09 am

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SALEM

Just a few years ago the Gloucester Stage Company hosted a cheery press conference, with gorgeous architectural drawings showing a stylishly renovated Gorton Theatre, promising plentiful amenities. Happy board members and GSC personnel bullishly announced a major capital campaign to fund it all.

None of that happened, and none of those people are there anymore. It's been a dramatic turn of events for GSC, which, after three-and-a-half decades, should be on a more even keel.

The capital campaign collapsed under its own weight, presumably because the rumored \$5 million goal quickly became much larger. Managing director Andrew Burgreen left soon after, replaced by Costin Manu, who also left after less than one season. Board president Bea Waring was replaced by Robert Boulrice.



And, just last month, artistic director Eric Engel, who brought a level of expertise to the stage company that will be difficult to duplicate, also left, unceremoniously. Instead of building a palace for theater on Smith Cove, word was that GSC was considering leaving East Main St. for a better location.

The transition at GSC in 2003, when co-founder Israel Horowitz handed over the artistic reins to Engel, was seamless, mainly because of Engel's experience and programming skill. This new transition is a sea-change, a complete upheaval in leadership, at a time when GSC should be cementing its position as the best presenter of serious theater on the North Shore.

Boulrice, new managing director Jon Wojciechowski, and interim artistic director Robert Walsh have announced a new season—at least they've posted it online—which extends GSC's usual summer presentations deep into the shoulder seasons. With seven productions rather than four, there is reason for hope in East Gloucester. Everyone's watching.

And speaking of theater..

The robust presence of community theater on Cape Ann proves there is a strong local market for the stage. Joseph Stiliano's Cape Ann Shakespeare Troupe, Nan Webber's Theater in the Pines, Pauline Miceli's CAT Collaborative—and others—show up each season with volunteer actors and crew to explore interesting Shakespeare, comedy and drama.

Is there a problem with that? Only that they compete with each other. And while each of those troupes does an excellent job finding committed players and personnel, they all do a poor job of getting the word out.

Here's a suggestion: form a Cape Ann community theater marketing network. Let any group join, for a fee—a small fee. Name the distinguished Nan Webber president—just because. Meet once a year, working out schedules and venues.



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