

Avon Theatre to Take the Show 'On the Road' made possible by The First Bank of Greenwich

By Susan Shultz

(Ad) Since opening its doors in 1939, the Avon Theatre has been a cultural anchor for Stamford and the surrounding communities. Now, with a \$14 million renovation, the beloved landmark is preparing for a dramatic transformation, according to Executive Director Peter Gistelinck.

The renovation will be comprehensive and is made possible through bridge loan financing from The First Bank of Greenwich, the Avon's valued banking partner. Plans include but are not limited to an expansion of the building, state-of-the-art laser projectors, Dolby Atmos sound, a new multimedia and multi-functional space, and the addition of a cocktail bar and small eatery.

"It's a really big moment for us, and we're incredibly excited," Gistelinck said.

Avon on Tour

With the final in-theatre screening held in mid-January, the Avon has now launched Avon on Tour.

Screenings will be hosted at venues including the Darien Library, the Bruce Museum in Greenwich, Stamford Town Center, Harbor Point, Ferguson Library, and Mill River Park for the Summer movies — all locations Gistelinck is particularly pleased to include.

"We've created a thoughtful mix of films that fit these venues well, while also bringing back selections from the top 100 films in the Avon's history," Gistelinck said.

Several of the events will feature post-screening talkbacks and discussions to preserve the Avon's sig-



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nature interactive experience.

"Nearly all of the screenings are free to the public, and that's especially meaningful in Stamford," he said. "We reach a different demographic here — families, children, and many in the Black and Latinx communities. And the Avon exists for the entire community."

A Community Connection

The First Bank of Greenwich President Frank J. Gaudio recalls his first meeting with Gistelinck as "love at first sight."

"This man is incredible. It's a pleasure to work with someone so energetic and knowledgeable. We support more than 40 nonprofits, and Peter is one of the most impressive people I've encountered in my banking career," Gaudio said.

A lifelong supporter of the arts, Gaudio said his passion made supporting the Avon a natural fit.

"I can't wait to see the

theater reopen because I already know what it will become. That made this an easy decision for me as a banker — and not just because I like him," he added with a laugh.

"Even during the tour, I'm excited. Banking can sometimes be routine, but not this partnership. It's rewarding to be involved from the very beginning."

Gistelinck emphasized that the Avon's Board of Directors has been closely involved throughout the whole process.

"My board co-chairs, Arthur Selkowitz and Susan Cullman, have been very much involved and are the real drivers of this project from the very beginning. We would not succeed without their support as well as from our Board of Directors," he said.

Gaudio noted the same is true at the bank.

Gistelinck described the collaboration as a standout example of how a for-profit institution and a nonprofit organization can work together effectively.

"This is a remarkable partnership and a model for how these relationships can benefit the community," he said.

The Avon Theatre is expected to celebrate its grand reopening in the summer of 2027. In the meantime, updates on renovations and the **Avon on Tour** schedule are available at avontheatre.org.

For more information on The First Bank of Greenwich, visit greenwichfirst.com.

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