

Sept. 22, 2008 - Article from the Washington Daily News:

Rocky Hock Playhouse moving to Washington

Published 12:06am Monday, September 22, 2008

By MIKE VOSS
Contributing Editor

One of eastern North Carolina's top family friendly entertainment venues is moving to Washington next year.

Rocky Hock Playhouse will be housed on the former Washington High School campus in Washington as of January 2009. Currently, Rocky Hock Playhouse is located in Rocky Hock, just north of Edenton in Chowan County. Rocky Hock Playhouse is known for its religious-themed shows and performances. Rocky Hock Playhouse is operated by Emmerich Theatre Production Co.

With attendance at the Christian theater declining since 2003, Jeff and Gloria Emmerich were looking in the Tideland area of Virginia for a new home for the playhouse because many of its patrons over the years came from that area. Instead, the Emmerichs said, God has different plans for them and Rocky Hock Playhouse.

Since opening its doors in December 2000, the theater has attracted 170,000 patrons. It's also attracted actors from 26 states. The theater traces its roots to a summer theater at Nags Head in 1997, Jeff Emmerich said Sunday during a telephone interview.

The move to Washington means changes, except for at least one thing, he said.

Moving the theater to a new home wasn't going to be easy, physically and emotionally, Emmerich said. The Emmerichs thought that move would be to the Tidewater area.

The search for a new home for the playhouse was exhaustive.

The remodeled auditorium at the former Washington High School will seat at least 1,000 people, according to Emmerich. Not only with the theater have more seating capacity, it will have amenities such as dressing rooms, a full-size stage, box office and catwalks above the stage. There's plenty of room to grow, Emmerich said.

For a time, it looked like the theater would remain

in Chowan County.

Emmerich said Washington and Rocky Hock Playhouse should be a good fit for each other. The theater will complement what's already a strong arts community in the Washington area, he said. The theater will benefit from Washington being a tourism hub in the region. Moving the theater to Washington puts it closer to Greenville and Raleigh, and still within reasonable driving time from the Tidewater area, Emmerich said.

Because it will be close to East Carolina University and its theater department, the theater should find it easier to recruit local actors, Emmerich said.

The Emmerichs are scheduled to meet with representatives of the Washington/Beaufort County Chamber of Commerce on Wednesday. That meeting, in part, is designed to inform the Emmerichs about what the area has to offer and the chamber about what Rocky Hock Playhouse has to offer.

In addition to Emmerichs moving to Washington, some familiar Rocky Hock Playhouse faces — Holly Emmerich (the Emmerichs' daughter), Darryl Stallings and Lisa Walker — will remain with the troupe. The theater's yearly lineup of four shows will be joined by the addition of a children's show in fall 2009.

The former Washington High School campus has a commercial kitchen, providing the possibility for dinner theater.

An Easter musical is slated to be the first show at the theater's new home in Washington. That show will run in March and April.