

Wortham Theater Center returns to the stage with help from FEMA

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AUSTIN, Texas – In August 2017, as the season was underway for Houston's ballet and opera companies, Hurricane Harvey's flood waters rushed into the Wortham Theater Center, home to the Houston Ballet and Houston Grand Opera. Water remained in the center for two weeks, ruining not only facilities, but also contents needed for performances like costumes, props and wigs.

The Nutcracker stage went dark.

The Wortham is the second-largest performing arts center in the United States, and Houston's nonprofit arts and culture sector generates over \$1.1 billion of revenue annually, supporting over 25,000 full-time jobs. The Houston community, FEMA and others played lead roles in getting this cultural treasure open again quickly.

FEMA provided \$37 million from its Public Assistance (PA) program to the city of Houston, through the Texas Division of Emergency Management, to repair the Wortham Theater and its park-like Fish Plaza.

FEMA Administrator Pete Gaynor recently visited the Wortham to hear from local officials, including Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner, about the center's recovery from Harvey. Gaynor noted this recovery is an example of a partnership-rich relationship between the state, the city, Houston First (which operates the center) and FEMA.



“FEMA has been absolutely terrific,” said Roksan Okan-Vick, an urban development officer with Houston First. She said that while Houston First didn’t work directly with FEMA, its PA and Mitigation teams were accessible to provide the proper guidance needed to apply for funding.

The staff worked to salvage what they could to continue some performances, held at other locations, but the center was not fully operational until September 2018. “It was a big scramble to get it up so they could have a full season,” said Okan-Vick. But, she said, “The re-opening was part of healing for the arts community.”

This year, the singing and the dancing continue at the Wortham as the center hosts the Verdi opera Aida and, for the ballet’s 50th anniversary season, The Sleeping Beauty.

PA is FEMA's largest grant program, providing assistance so communities can quickly respond to and recover from major disasters or emergencies declared by the president. The program also encourages protection of damaged facilities from future events through hazard mitigation measures.

For additional information about Hurricane Harvey and Texas recovery, visit the Hurricane Harvey disaster web page at www.fema.gov/disaster/4332, Facebook at www.facebook.com/FEMAharvey, the FEMA Region 6 Twitter account at www.twitter.com/FEMARegion6 or the Texas Division of Emergency Management website at <https://tdem.texas.gov>.

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