



PRESS RELEASE
July 7, 2025

For More Information:
Kaarin Austin
board@grandcinema.com

Grand Cinema purchases its home, hires new executive director

TACOMA, WA – The Grand Cinema has successfully concluded a \$5.5 million fundraising campaign and, as of July 1, is the owner of the Merlino Arts Center, where it has operated since its founding in 1997. It also is bringing on a new executive director, Elizabeth Calhoun (photo).



Located at 606 Fawcett Avenue, the three-story Arts Center includes several tenants besides The Grand, including the Tacoma City Ballet, Dukesbay Theater, Corina Bakery, and multiple Kim artists lofts. The Grand, a nonprofit corporation, will earn income from those renters, which it will put toward operations and growth.

“The community made this happen. We couldn’t be more grateful for the outpouring of support that made this acquisition a reality,” says Board Chair Kaarin Austin. “This puts us on solid financial footing and gives us control of our future.”

The four-screen cinema has over 4,500 dues-paying members and is open 365 days per year. It shows both “art house” and mainstream movies, with a commitment to showing films from lesser-known filmmakers and under-represented groups. It hosts regular gatherings with filmmakers and educators in its community lounge and sponsors many community outreach events, including an annual film camp.

Philip Cowan, who has served as executive director for the past 18 years, will be stepping down from his post in August. His successor, Elizabeth Calhoun, will begin her tenure on July 7.



“I just couldn’t think of a better way to cap off my time at The Grand than with the successful purchase of our building,” Cowan says. “It has been a goal of mine and our board ever since I started in the executive role.”

Calhoun comes to The Grand with a long history in the film and arts sector, including the Hollywood Theater in Portland, the Seattle International Film Festival, and the Gage Academy of Art in Seattle. She also has experience working for Landmark and Regal, two of the country’s largest for-profit movie theater chains.

“I’ve been working in and around movie theaters since 1994, and this is exactly the type of role I’ve wanted my entire career,” Calhoun says. “I am excited to get to know Tacoma and the wonderful community that comprises The Grand Cinema.”

###