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Albee Theater Future Tied to Federal Grant

The future of the Albee Theater as a performing arts center depends largely on its selection as the site of a federally financed repertory theater project promised to Providence, members of IMPACT R.I., Inc., were told yesterday.

Seth K. Gifford, an attorney for B. A. Dario, who purchased the theater last November, said the Albee needs the rental fees that would be provided by the repertory theater project. Questioned after the meeting, Mr. Gifford said he was not prepared to say whether Mr. Dario, Lincoln Downs president and treasurer, was planning to make other use of the theater if it should fail to be selected for the federal program.

"I think a commitment on the federal theater project will definitely put the possibility of a long run in view," Mr. Gifford told IMPACT.

"The pieces are dropping into place," he said in reference to the theater's future.

Mr. Gifford said it was his opinion that the Albee is well suited to a repertory theater project, which he said would occupy it for 32 to 36 weeks of the school year and provide free serious drama for school children. He remarked that U.S. Rep. John E. Fogarty has said Providence is to have one of three theaters under the National Council on the Arts program.

Questioned by John C. A. Watkins, president and publisher of the Journal-Bulletin

and an IMPACT director, Mr. Gifford said he did not know what repairs will be made to the 49-year-old theater.

"I think if extensive repairs are necessary they will be done as part of getting ready for the federal program," he said.

Mr. Watkins then asked Mr. Gifford how such repairs could be financed.

"I imagine they could be financed in the same manner in which the theater was purchased," he replied. Mr. Dario signed a \$350,000 mortgage with the Industrial National Bank in purchasing the Albee.

Mr. Gifford said he thinks there is "still a need of a foundation to operate the Albee." Formation of a foundation has been in prospect since the theater was acquired last November, but no action has been

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taken other than several meetings of persons invited to become trustees.

Mr. Gifford said the foundation probably will be called something like the Providence Performing Arts Foundation and would be responsible for the rental, operation and management of the theater. Originally the group was to have been called the Dario Foundation, and Mr. Gifford said two weeks ago that the name would be changed to the Performing Arts Charitable Foundation.

Mr. Gifford said after the meeting that he has no immediate plans to establish the foundation. Some action may be taken in that direction next week, he added.

After his 10-minute presentation to IMPACT, Mr. Gifford said federal funds for the repertory theater would be a "boost" or subsidy for the theater. He confirmed that use of the theater for the matinee school children's programs could cause some disruption of other events already booked there.

"Other use of the Albee would be restricted by rehearsals and scenery which either would have to be moved or

raised up, or whatever they do with it," Mr. Gifford said. He added, however, that he was confident that the theater would be available for some other performances during evenings and weekends.

Renzo Raiss, artistic director of the Albee, has announced bookings for a number of events at the theater next fall, when presumably the repertory program would be in operation. These include Metropolitan Opera National Touring Company presentations and a concert by the Moscow Orchestra.

IMPACT directors met for more than one hour in executive session. Frank G. Shea, an attorney and secretary of the group, said the session dealt primarily with the future of the Albee and plans for refurbishing the Veterans Memorial Auditorium. He declined to give further details.