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## Former Palace official returning to become managing director

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Billy Piskutz, the incoming managing director of the Palace Theatre.

### *Albany*

The Palace Theatre opted for an alumnus in its choice for a new managing director.

William Piskutz, who was development director at the theater from 2008 to 2011, returns to the Palace in mid-June to succeed Owen Smith, who has been managing director for the past six years.

Piskutz is finishing a four-year stint at the Saratoga Performing Arts Center in Saratoga Springs, where he has been senior director of development since early last year and before that was director of corporate affairs. Piskutz also has worked for MVP Health Care and the American Cancer Society.

Stephen Baboulis, vice chair of the Palace's board of directors, said of Piskutz in an emailed statement, "His great operational knowledge of our theater and the performing arts will be a terrific asset to the organization."

"This beloved venue and its storied history and relationship to the community hold a special place in my heart," said Piskutz in a statement distributed with news of his hiring. The announcement said Piskutz's duties will include "helping advance the cause of

(the Palace) in the community," management support for front-of-house staff who interact with patrons and offering input on programming decisions.

The Palace also announced Wednesday that Danny Taylor, its director of operations and a longtime theater employee, has been promoted to senior director of operations and programming.

Smith, the outgoing managing director, announced earlier this month that he would be leaving the Palace after a replacement was identified. He said he will devote his full attention to running Park Playhouse, of which he has been producing artistic director since early 2010. The shared use of Smith was conceived at a time when Albany-based Park Playhouse was principally a summer company, and the Palace's season generally was fall to spring, with few events during the months Park Playhouse was busiest.

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Today, Park Playhouse's budget is double what it was six years ago; this year, its 30th performing at the lakehouse amphitheater in Washington Park, features two summer production in the park and four held during the rest of the year at the Cohoes Music Hall; and the company has plans for five shows at the music hall next year and four summer productions.

At the same time, the Palace is considerably busier, and last fall it brought in a new executive director, Susan Rosko Fogarty, to guide it through the \$30 million first phase of a renovation and expansion that ultimately could cost upward of \$65 million and include a new, 600-seat theater down the block on North Pearl Street from the historic Palace.

"It really got to be too much for one person to wear both hats," Fogarty said when the job search was announced. She said the two companies each felt they needed a dedicated person in the respective positions, and Smith wanted to devote his time to continuing to build Park Playhouse.

"I wish Billy all the best in his new role at the Palace, and I stand ready to be as helpful as I can possibly be during this transition," Smith said. Though the two know one another, their respective tenures at the Palace did not overlap.

Partly as a result of Smith's dual roles, the Palace and Park Playhouse have long had a relationship that included use of performance and rehearsal space, educational components and other agreements and services. Allen S. Goodman, president of Park Playhouse's board, said the two companies are in discussions about the future of their relationship and how it can best serve the public.