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## **Sheridan Coliseum: Case statement, draft, for the Fort Hays State University Sheridan Coliseum Campaign**

Fort Hays State University

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Fort Hays State University  
Sheridan Coliseum Campaign

CASE STATEMENT

Established in 1902 as the Western Branch State Normal School, Fort Hays State University was born of the idea that the education of area residents was of major importance if the high plains of Western Kansas were to realize its maximum development potential. In order to provide physical facilities for the new school, the United States Congress transferred ownership of Fort Hays -- an old military post abandoned in 1889 -- to the State of Kansas in 1901.

During its first year, 19 students and two faculty members attended classes in what had been the post's hospital building. It was not until two years later that the first permanent school structure was built -- Academic Hall, which was later renamed Picken Hall. By then, all of the old post's buildings had been sold and moved except for the guard house which was converted into a gymnasium, and two houses on officers row which were saved for faculty housing.

Slowly, the school began to grow and mature. A new gymnasium was completed in 1906, and a new Industrial Building was added in 1912. The school's first principal, William S. Picken, left in 1913, and William A. Lewis was named President of the school. Under Lewis's direction, the school would soon become the music mecca of Western Kansas. Henry Edward Malloy was brought from Bethany College in Lindsborg to head up the school's music department in 1914, and in a few short years his influence began to be felt throughout the entire state. Graduates from the school who joined the teaching staffs of Western Kansas schools developed outstanding orchestras, bands, and choral groups, and Malloy's musical productions began to gather larger and larger followings among people living outside of the Hays area.

President Lewis saw great things for the school, and he envisioned it becoming the cultural center of Western Kansas. He also saw a need for a spacious coliseum which would:

- 1) help to attract larger numbers of students from other Kansas communities outside of the Hays area,
- 2) enable the school to undertake a more ambitious program of musical presentations, and
- 3) afford the entire Western Kansas area with a facility large enough to put on major civic and cultural events.

The dream came true on March 23, 1917, when the doors opened to the public for the first time at the school's new Sheridan Coliseum. It was the largest facility of its kind in Western Kansas. Many called it "The Convention Hall of Western Kansas", and others said it was a "white elephant that would never be filled". Regardless of what it was called, the structure -- which was named after a prominent military officer and once Commander of the old fort, General Philip Sheridan -- was magnificent and inspiring to all who came to see it. It was funded by a legislative appropriation in 1915, and it was the only building funded by the legislature for any state school that year.

Many legislators were critical of the use of state funds to build such a large structure in the western part of the state, and President Lewis was considered by many to be an "impractical visionary" for his part in its creation. All of this skepticism disappeared when the structure proved to be too small the first time it was used. Since that time, "standing-room-only" crowds have become commonplace in the coliseum. During its inaugural year, Sheridan Coliseum hosted the first Grand Opera ever presented in Western Kansas, and two years later, the first of the nationally acclaimed Music Festivals was held there.

Visitors were often surprised to discover that the coliseum contained a swimming pool, modern seating for almost 3,000 people, outstanding lighting, and much more. This wonderful building has provided an almost spiritual place for Fort Hays State students and area residents to cheer on their basketball teams. Lovingly referred to as the "snake pit", supporters could rejoice over their wins and cry over their losses. For more than 65 years, it has served the campus, the community, and all of Western Kansas as classrooms, a gymnasium, an arena for horse shows, an auditorium, and even a theater for the performing arts.

For most of its existence, Sheridan Coliseum has served as the civic auditorium for the city of Hays. Even today with its time-worn facilities, it still is in demand by the people and organizations in the community. Its size and architecture have been unmatched from Salina to Denver. Almost everyone has memories of a good time spent in the "snake pit".

Although Sheridan Coliseum has badly deteriorated, the basic structure has not been abused. Surveys conducted by architects and construction engineers have proven the building to be structurally sound. Consideration was given to

razing Sheridan and replacing it with a new building. However, the replacement cost would be considerably more expensive, not to mention the loss of one of the most historically significant buildings in Western Kansas.

The overall plan for renovation has two objectives: first, is the transformation of Sheridan Coliseum from its current configuration into a 1,200 seat, completely remodeled performing arts center. Second, all the area surrounding the main auditorium will be converted into a more centralized student services center.

Renovations will be made in the following areas of the existing facility:

- \* the main auditorium and its balcony areas
- \* stage, dressing, and shop areas
- \* basement
- \* sound system
- \* theatrical equipment
- \* orchestra pit
- \* traps and fly gallery

Located throughout the three level complex and surrounding the main auditorium will be the administrative and student services offices for the university:

- \* Admissions Office
- \* Registrars Office
- \* Business Office
- \* Financial Aids Office
- \* Student Services Office
- \* Placement Office
- \* University Relations Office
- \* Institutional Research Office
- \* President's Office
- \* Vice President's Office

Fort Hays State University has three primary components in the Performing Arts: teaching and training, actual performances of students, and the visiting artists and performing arts organizations that provide live performances for the campus community and the citizens of the western half of the state.

The new performing arts center will enhance the basic components and enrich regional life by assisting the University to fulfill its responsibility as a major cultural and intellectual center for Western Kansas. It will provide the facilities necessary to meet the University's extensive academic and public service obligation in music, drama, dance and other cultural events.

The total cost of the renovation program will be in excess of \$6,000,000. Businesses, foundations, and citizens of the local community and surrounding area are being asked to provide \$2,000,000 to assure completion of this project.

Fort Hays State University makes a significant contribution to the economic welfare of the area. It employs many area residents -- over 512 full time and 170 part time -- and boasts an annual payroll approaching \$16,000,000. In addition to being one of the areas top employers, nearly \$7,000,000 is spent annually for goods and services required to operate the University's physical facilities, most of which flows directly back into the local economy. The expenditures for labor and materials over the next few years for the renovation of Sheridan Coliseum will also pump many new dollars into the local economy. A recent study conducted by the Fort Hays State University Department of Economics indicated that the University is a major economic force in Hays. This fact is demonstrated by the University's effect on the volume of business, personal income, city tax revenues, and jobs in the area.

* Direct impact	\$17,583,720
* Indirect impact	2,637,560
* Induced impact	11,429,420
TOTAL IMPACT	<u>\$31,650,700</u>

According to leading economists, expenditures of this magnitude will quadruple in their total impact on an area's economy. For these reasons, the University not only is a major contributor to the educational welfare of the community and Western Kansas, but also it is a major contributor to the economic welfare of both.