

SURFSIDE PLAYERS HISTORY

By Michael J. Boonstra

The history of the Surfside Players began on Tuesday April 7, 1959 when 24 prospective thespians met at the Anchorage Mortgage Building in Cocoa Beach, FL to form a group. Lowell Fenner was elected president, Barbara Weldon, VP, John Hardos Secretary, and Chuck Buckle, Treasurer. The group decided on "The Moon Is Blue" by H. Hugh Herbert as their first production and casting began on April the 21st. The production was put on May 21-23rd at the Fire House in Cocoa Beach.

The players proved popular and held frequent productions most commonly in the Driftwood Room at the Polaris Motel. In need of more space the Players approached the city of Cocoa Beach who suggested moving Teen Town to school board property and building the Players their own theatre on the city owned land occupied by Teen Town. It was also decided that they would share the space with the Central Brevard Art Association who was seeking space for a studio. In order to finance construction a \$20,000 bond issue was presented to the citizens of Central Brevard in \$100 denominations which payed 6% interest. Davis Engineering drew up the plans for a 250-seat building and the theatre was designed by Dick Bennett of Shiffalo and Associates and constructed by Frank Meier. By October over \$15,000 in bonds had been sold and the city agreed to lease the land to the Players, who had about 350 members, for \$1 a year. Construction started soon after on the 8,800 square foot, air-conditioned building which had 259 fixed seats. The seats came from the Old Rialto Theatre in Orlando and crews made several trips there to bring them back to Cocoa Beach where they were enlarged, sand-blasted and painted. The building was dedicated on April 28, 1963 at a well-attended ribbon cutting ceremony with the Players President Saul Feldman doing the honors.

The first production was "The Golden Fleecing" by Lorenzo Semple, Jr. which opened on May 2, followed by "A Visit to a Small Planet" by Gore Vidal.