

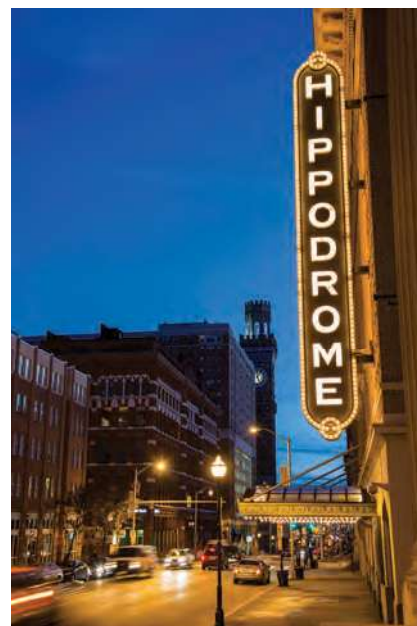
Ron Legler

France-Merrick Performing Arts Center President

BY CARYN R. SAGAL



Ron Legler, president of the France-Merrick Performing Arts Center



The Hippodrome Theatre

Growing up in Erie, Pennsylvania, Ron Legler had minimal access to theater. In fact, he didn't even see his first live show until attending Thiel College. But it's been a 35-year love affair ever since.

"A freshman-year elective class changed my life forever," Legler explains. "I was cast in *Spoon River* as several characters and by senior year I had the honor of playing Artie Shaughnessy in *The House of Blue Leaves*. That stage lit a fire in me that still burns today."

After college, Legler quickly realized that an actor's life, especially the rejection that comes with it, wasn't for him. He stepped off the stage and into the business side of theater starting with a position at the Jackie Gleason Theater in Miami Beach.

Following his tenure as group sales director for Pace Theatrical Group and agent for The Booking Group, Legler spent more than 13 years as president and CEO of the Florida Theatrical Association. He moved to Baltimore in 2014 to become president of the France-Merrick Performing Arts Center, home of the historic Hippodrome Theatre.

"The Hippodrome is a crown jewel of Baltimore's cultural legacy — from hosting vaudeville acts in 1914, to a

teenage Frank Sinatra singing with the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra, to launching major productions like *The Wiz*, & *Juliet* and the triumphant return of *The Phantom of the Opera* to the U.S. stage in 2025," Legler explains.

Under Legler's leadership, the season ticket base has grown from just over 5,000 to over 12,000. "We also helped create Maryland's first Theatrical Production Tax Credit, allowing Broadway shows to be born and launched right here in Baltimore," he says. "And we reimaged the M&T Bank Exchange with a \$22 million renovation."

For these and other accomplishments, Legler was named among Maryland's Most Admired CEOs by *The Daily Record* and honored with The Broadway League's Award for Outstanding Achievement in Presenter Management. This distinction recognizes "innovators who have displayed exemplary service to the Touring Broadway industry."

Legler says he's "incredibly proud of what we've built," but feels most humbled when witnessing "the power of storytelling and how theater brings people together" — especially when the theater is filled with children.

"There's something magical about a truly great show; it lingers in your soul long after the curtain falls," he

adds, citing *Les Misérables*, *Phantom of the Opera*, *Wicked*, *The Lion King* and, more recently, *Suffs* and *Purpose*, as productions that have "left a permanent mark on [his] heart."

Enthusiastic about the 2025-2026 season, Legler declares the lineup is a "testament to the Hippodrome's promise to deliver the very best touring shows Broadway has to offer."

"With new tours like *Water for Elephants*, *Phantom* and *The Great Gatsby*, plus the off-Broadway gem *Ceilidh* at the M&T Bank Exchange, there truly is something for everyone," he says. "We can't wait to share the wonderful experience that's in store with our dedicated subscribers and other supporters."

2029 will mark the 25th anniversary of the France-Merrick Performing Arts Center's reopening. Legler and his team are hard at work "preparing for the next phase of growth — one that ensures Broadway continues to call Maryland home."

For more information about the France-Merrick Performing Arts Center and upcoming performances, visit Baltimore.Broadway.com. □

Caryn R. Sagal is a Baltimore-based freelance writer.