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SB 153, authored by Sen. Ed Murray, D-New Orleans, would have required all Louisiana employers to pay women the same as men.

LA. DRIVERS CAN'T TWEET OR POST TO FACEBOOK

A bill prohibiting posting to social media sites while driving gained final approval with a 34-1 Senate vote Tuesday. It now heads to Gov. Bobby Jindal's desk.

A MATCH MADE IN HEAVEN: PASA, ACA TO MERGE

After months of flirting, PASA and the AcA are finally getting hitched.

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From left: Jill Merkl, Philip Gould, Vicki Chrisman, Dan Hare, Dr. Gerd Wuestemann and Joanie Hill.

In less than a month the Performing Arts Society of Acadiana will cease to exist. Technically.

By July 1, the venerable Lafayette arts presenter, which has been bringing top-tier performing arts productions to the Heymann Center for nearly a quarter century, will have relinquished its nonprofit status with the IRS and its charter number with the Louisiana secretary of state. But rather than go the way of so many arts entities in Lafayette before it, PASA will simply move catty-corner across the Vermilion-Jefferson intersection and into the Acadiana Center for the Arts.

In what is being likened to a marriage, PASA and the AcA are merging their respective staffs and doubling down their efforts to make Lafayette a performing-arts hub in South Louisiana.

“All of the mission, the programming, all of the aspects of what PASA does will continue,” says Vicki Chrisman, PASA’s executive director. “The legal status at the state and federal level will come to an end. But everything that makes PASA what it is will continue.”

Chrisman gathered with her AcA counterpart, Dr. Gerd Wuestemann, and board members from each organization on a recent afternoon in the AcA café skirting the Moncus Theater on Vermilion Street to discuss the merger. Wuestemann will retain the title of executive director of the AcA; Chrisman will assume an as-yet undetermined title.

“Together we will be a better and stronger organization than we are separately,” says Dan Hare, PASA’s board president. “This is a great facility, and we’ve obviously had a relationship with it by offering programming here from time to time, so that’s an obvious asset.”

The PASA brand will be maintained through longtime programming like its Main Stage series at the Heymann, which routinely introduces Lafayette audiences to world-class performing arts — modern dance, classical and jazz music, Broadway musicals. PASA’s Singer + Songwriter series, which began about a year ago and uses the more intimate Moncus Theater at the AcA as its venue, will continue as well. Other PASA initiatives — its instrument recycling drive for area public schools, its scholarship program and daytime performances for students — will keep going, too.

“What we’ve been excited about is that we’re both coming to this at a very positive time in both organizations,” says Jill Merkl, a PASA board member and past president. “It is not through any kind of crisis or need — it’s a good decision that’s being made at a time when we’re both doing well.”

The decision to merge the organizations has its genesis in the so-called “Arts Alliance,” an informal gathering of performing arts groups in Lafayette that began meeting just more than a year ago to discuss ways to maximize their efforts. Lafayette, it can be said, is at a critical stage in its growth as a performing arts hub: there is a limited number of venues in which to present performances, there is a limited audience for such performances and an even more limited pool of patrons — corporate and individual — willing and able to underwrite performing arts groups with cash. Toss in a national recession and very limited funding from local government, and conditions were ripe.

“We didn’t come to this in a crisis situation, because that never works,” says longtime PASA board member Joanie Hill, another past president. “It was something that just made sense to do from all directions.”

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COOL TOWN 2013

This year’s Cool Town issue is all about people who are not native to South Louisiana but made a conscious decision to be here, to be among us, to participate in our culture and contribute to it.

A CURIOUS COMPACT

A shelved ordinance transferring \$200,000 from a northside drainage project to a south Lafayette development may not break any laws, but it stinks to high heaven.

POOYIE 2012

It’s good, it’s bad and it’s just plain crazy.

SAVING SATURDAY NIGHT

An effort to restore a shuttered dancehall and document other vacant or razed honky-tonks could serve as a model

Discussions among arts alliance members evolved into a courtship between the AcA and PASA — a relationship that the respective boards of directors embraced. Those boards will also merge, forming a 21-member board.

“I think the process has been a very slow and deliberative one,” says AcA board President Philip Gould. “We’ve had I don’t know how many meetings, just getting comfortable with the idea and getting to know each other.”

Lafayette isn’t a sprawling metropolis, and the community of performing-arts consumers is even more intimate, so there was already familiarity among the respective boards. And they evidently liked what they saw: both boards voted unanimously in favor of the merger.

“This is so compelling, and the merger makes so much sense; it allows us to leverage resources to approach donors, givers, patrons, as one entity rather than each going to them separately,” notes Wuestemann. “It gives us joint resources now, which is wonderful. Our outreach will grow by a multitude. In other words, what we’re seeing is enormous growth and economic opportunities for us, and I think that’s the main motivating factor.”

The merger, adds Wuestemann, will also be a cost-saver by eliminating the need for duplication in many areas, notably office space and equipment. Since PASA will technically cease to exist, it will also no longer be eligible for grant money, which is one of the AcA’s main functions — dispersing state and national grants to arts organizations in the eight-parish Acadiana region. But, by beefing up its own staff through the merger, the AcA itself will likely be eligible for increased grant funding.

The PASA-AcA merger, all agree, could and should become a model for arts organizations statewide. Although such mergers have been undertaken on a limited basis in other states, this is evidently the first such marriage of substantial arts entities in the state of Louisiana.

“This is an all-out coming together,” says Wuestemann. “In other words we are getting married and it’s as real and serious as it can be.”

Adds Merkl: “This is the most compelling, no-brainer decision that there is. These two organizations are so similar and contribute decades of history, and that synergy is in every facet of the organizational collaborative structure, so it absolutely makes sense.”

[Walter Pierce](#)

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Deborah Simeral

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Jack Ferstel · Instructor of English at University of Louisiana at Lafayette

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