

DOWNTOWN ALBANY ROCKS AND THE CAPITAL REGION KEEPS THE BEAT GOING IN TECH VALLEY

by Jon Winslow

Chris Rock made the Palace crack, Godsmack will make Pearl Street shake and Jewel will strum her guitar into the hearts of concertgoers – and this is why the Capital Region will rock the entertainment scene for 2004.



CHRIS ROCK PERFORMED AT THE PALACE.

Besides the Governor's Mansion and the imposing architecture of the famous Empire State Plaza, downtown Albany has much more to offer than just a historical visit. The downtown area still maintains much of its original Dutch and Colonial character, but it has merged with a variety of modern-day venues.

Travel from one side of Pearl Street in downtown to the other and you'll walk by the Pepsi Arena, Albany's largest and most popular sports and entertainment complex, and end up at the doors of the his-

toric Palace Theater, an ornate movie house built in the 1930s and recently reopened after three million dollars worth of renovations.

Both sites are venues which draw world famous talent from all over the country and the world. This spring, the Palace will host famous comedians like Joan Rivers, Tracy Morgan and Howie Mandel. While the Palace may be the cultural cornerstone of the downtown area, the Pepsi draws thousands of fans to see a variety of acts.

“WE HAVE AN ADVANTAGE OVER ANY OTHER SMALL CITY... ARTISTS FROM NEW YORK, BOSTON, MONTREAL CAN BE HERE IN A FEW HOURS”

In 2003, the Pepsi hosted major sporting events such as the NCAA East Regional Basketball Championships. Several other world class acts will perform in downtown Albany, according to Pepsi Arena General Manager Bob Belber.

“We have several big shows playing the

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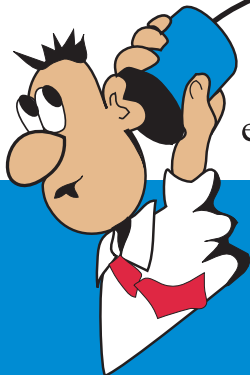
845 Madison Avenue
Albany, NY 12208

Will Rowan
Director of Operations

518-435-9755

518-435-9271 fax

email: madisonwireless@hotmail.com



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WILLIE NELSON WILL PERFORM AT THE PEPSI, MAY 15.

Pepsi Arena this spring into summer. Alan Jackson and Martina McBride will be performing on April 25th, Willie Nelson with special guests The Charlie Daniels Band and The Marshall Tucker Band will be here on May 15th, and we will have several other top-notch acts here over the summer."

The Palace Theatre has also put together an impressive list of events in the coming months including Kenny Loggins, Jewel, Johnny Mathis, George Thorogood and Joan Rivers with Don Rickles to name a few.

Proctors Theatre, a beautifully restored facility that first opened in 1926, is located in downtown Schenectady. It is renowned for bringing world-class talent to the area year after year. In Troy, the Troy Savings Bank Music Hall, built in 1870, is considered an acoustical wonder, and continues to draw local and national talent.

Ed Lange of the New York State Theater Institute (NYSTI) in Troy explains the phenomenon that has always brought top-flight talent to the Capital District: "Location."

"We have an advantage over almost every other small city in the country.

Artists from New York, Boston or Montreal can travel to our area easily. By train or by car, they can be here in a few hours," Lange said.

"This spring and summer, we will have a visiting theater company from Sweden performing in our theater. They will fly in to New York City then take a 'short' ride to the area – it is easier for them than traveling to the Midwest or even other New York State venues."

The NYSTI is one of several theater companies that provide quality local, national and internationally produced performances. Joining NYSTI are the Capital Repertory Theater, the Cohoes Music Hall and a several venues associated with the regions educational institutions. The Capital Rep, as it is known locally, focuses on more artistic and edgy theater.

If music is more your scene, a short drive gives audiences a unique opportunity to interact with big-named bands in a small-town environment. Clifton Park's Northern Lights features a variety of local and national talent in a small, intimate setting.

Ultimately, Capital District's residents sum it up best.

"It's the variety that keeps me happy," says Kate Cusick, a nurse who grew up in a small town in central New York. *"We like going to bars in Saratoga or kids shows at the [Pepsi] Arena. There's always something."*

"It's not New York," says Mike Riley, who moved to the area from Brooklyn 10 years ago. *"It's much better than that."*