

For Immediate Release  
Julie McGarvie, Marketing Director  
[Julie.mcgarvie@penumbra theatre.org](mailto:Julie.mcgarvie@penumbra theatre.org) or 651.288.6784

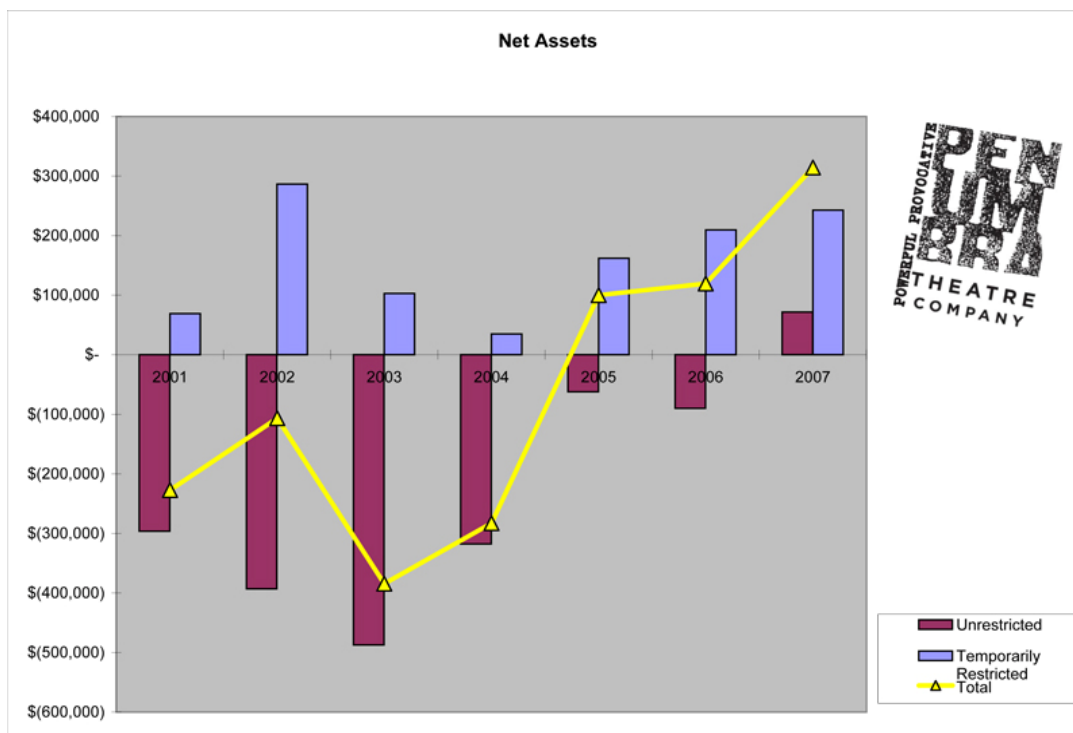
## PENUMBRA THEATRE

Enters New Era with successful track record

December 4, 2007, St. Paul, MN: Penumbra Theatre Company, one of the nation's preeminent African American theaters, announced today the successful completion of a four-year restructuring effort and the implementation of a five-year New Era capacity building plan.

### **Fiscal Report: 2007 Audit and Completion of Restructuring**

Fiscal 2007 was a profitable year for Penumbra, and marked the fourth consecutive year the organization ended in the black. It also marked the successful culmination of its four-year restructuring plan during which it eliminated \$600,000 of old debt and established solid administrative and financial practices. "This is great news. Paying off the debt through operations counters national trends and we are very proud of that," stated Warren Simpson, board treasurer. "Penumbra received a clean opinion from its auditors, Wilkerson Associates, and our net assets increased \$194,820 from the year prior. While we do not expect comparable increases this year, we remain confident that we have taken the appropriate steps to ensure the financial solvency of Penumbra in the years ahead, particularly as our New Era Campaign gains momentum."



This one picture, tells the remarkable turnaround story. In 2003, the business side of the house was sagging badly under poor operational systems, weak controls and significant debt. As good as it was, the art couldn't save Penumbra. The board faced the difficult decision to rebuild or close the doors. The bright rising line traces Penumbra's rebirth.

Of the restructuring effort, David Abrams, board chair, stated “In a recommitment to an African-American voice that needs and deserves to be heard in the Twin Cities community, Penumbra forged new governance and operational models to support its mission. Without compromising its provocative vision or artistic integrity, Penumbra has emerged financially solvent, fundamentally changed as an organization, and ready to begin a new era. We believe our results from these efforts are deserving of recognition and ongoing support.”

Highlights of the four-year restructuring effort and artistic accomplishments include:

- Four consecutive years of being in the black with increased net assets
- Elimination of \$600,000 of old debt
- Established strong financial systems with oversight by an expanded, experienced board
- Dramatically increased development activity: generated an additional \$1 million from 1,500 donors in only 36 months; and launched The Baobab Family, a donor cultivation program that rewards long-time patrons and motivates others to give at higher levels.
- 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary season broke box office records, doubling ticket sales from the previous season.
- National demand for Lou Bellamy to direct reached new heights culminating with his directorial debut in New York City – winning the coveted 2007 Obie Award for Best Direction. Bellamy received numerous national and local awards including the 2006 McKnight Distinguished Artist Award.

**New Era Transition Plan**

As part of the restructuring effort, the board of directors completed an 18-month comprehensive planning process resulting in a vision for a sustainable organization by the year 2012. In order to achieve this vision, Penumbra must implement a capacity building plan that requires an infusion of \$2.9 million in extraordinary funding, separate from and in addition to current funding.

Kate Barr, Executive Director of NonProfit Assistance Fund observed, “Penumbra Theatre has done great work over the last four years moving from less sustainable to short-term sustainable. The work ahead will require additional staff, more infrastructure, and institutionalized systems and practices. It will require sufficient working capital – one of the most stabilizing things for any organization.”

“We’re calling this The New Era. I truly believe it is,” added Abrams. “The campaign is being built upon a management foundation laid over the last four years – and upon an artistic legacy built over the last thirty. We are prepared and primed to move forward.”

The \$2.9 million campaign goals are:

- the establishment of a working capital fund to provide internal bridge financing and to be responsive to marketplace opportunities: \$600,000
- the expansion and retention of its donor base to ensure sustained funding: \$620,000
- the acquisition of more working room to accommodate new staff and patron services: \$620,000
- the implementation of a plan for artistic succession that ensures continued representation of an authentic African American experience: \$180,000
- the development of a formal education and outreach program to promote racial understanding: \$300,000
- the production of the entire *20<sup>th</sup> Century Cycle* by August Wilson, an unprecedented tribute presented over five years: \$500,000

The campaign was launched in January 2007 and \$1.5 million has been pledged to date. “Response from the community has been very strong. We are already half-way to our goal,” stated Phyllis Goff, vice chair of the Penumbra board and New Era Campaign Committee Co-

Chair. “The bar has been set very high with \$500,000 lead gifts from both the McKnight Foundation and Cargill and \$50,000 lead gifts from individuals.”

The New Era Campaign committee is comprised of Penumbra board members, past and present, and some of the Twin Cities leading executives – David Abrams, Vice President, North Memorial Health Care; Mary Brainerd, Chief Executive Officer, HealthPartners, Inc.; Dick Cisek, Richard M. Cisek Associates; Patrick Donovan, President, Bremer Financial; Roxanne Givens, Principal Designer, ethnicHome, Phyllis Rawls Goff, community volunteer; Terry Hoffman, community volunteer, Beckwith Horton, retired Chief Executive Officer, Microtron, Inc.; Reatha Clark King, retired President, General Mills Foundation; Barbara Lupient, retired Chief Executive Officer, Lupient Enterprises; Mike Monahan, Vice President, Ecolab, Inc.; Frank Sims, Corporate Vice President, Cargill; Stew Widdess, President, The Widdess Group.

“We are very fortunate to have the time and attention of these busy individuals. It speaks volumes about Penumbra and the vital role it plays in the arts and cultural landscape here,” noted Patrick Donovan, President of Bremer Bank and New Era Campaign Committee Co-Chair. “Phyllis and the Penumbra staff have made this a very strategic and efficient campaign. It is hard to refuse once you see how far they have come and their determination to be accountable for their future. The pride is contagious.”

Penumbra has approached its reorganization and growth with the philosophy that one must look to its past in order to look to its future. “In many organizations, the mission is ethereal and amorphous. At Penumbra, it is, very simply, who we are,” stated founder and artistic director, Lou Bellamy.

“Nothing illustrates Penumbra’s consistency more demonstrably than the way in which the organization views its artistic legacy. It is clearly situated in a continuum of black intellectual thought beginning with the Black Arts Movement and its founder’s interpretation of that movement, and will be further shaped by all who follow,” stated Chris Widdess, managing director.

The cultivation of new artistic leadership and new work is a critical component of the New Era transition. These two needs coalesce to form a solid platform from which Penumbra’s legacy can be examined and its consistency ensured.

Penumbra has created a new position, associate artistic director, and retained Dominic Taylor for this role in July 2007. Under the leadership and direction of the founding artistic director and for the duration of his appointment, Taylor will help to shape the direction and scope of the organization’s artistic initiatives. He has been a New York based practicing theater artist for the past 20 years and relocated to Saint Paul with his wife Kelli Garrett. He holds both a B.A. and M.F.A. from Brown University.

Over the last four months, Taylor developed a new play initiative entitled “The Okra: African Diaspora Theatre Development Process.” Okra is a program that will identify, nurture, and assist in the development of artists, particularly black artists, through the entire process of play writing from initial idea to multiple productions. The program has four components: Readings Plus; The Wilson Lab; The New Playground/Gym; and Publishing. Receptive to participants from around the country and world, Okra primarily focuses on artists from the Twin Cities and New York City metropolitan areas.