

# Retired Teacher Pouring Efforts Into New Theater Troupe

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The plywood floors are dusty and their shiny metal support beams still exposed, but, within a month, the new 1st Stage theater school in Tysons Corner will be ready to offer aspiring actors essential on-stage training.

"It's a lot like a teaching hospital," said artistic director Mark Krikstan. "Your education continues, despite the fact that you're working at a professional level."

The school has been a long-standing dream for Krikstan, who retired recently after spending 11 years as George C. Marshall High School's theater teacher.

Krikstan, whose students at Marshall won five state championships, began working on 1st Stage a year ago with five other founding members.

"I naively thought it would be, 'Let's find a space and put on a show,'" he said, echoing the storyline of numerous Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland movies.

Then reality, in the form of Fairfax County parking and building regulations, set in.

1st Stage is located in a 6,500-square-foot space at 1524-LL Spring Hill Road in the Spring Hill Business Center. In addition to the main stage area, which will seat about 100 people, the school will have a classroom and a library stocked with theatrical materials.

The Board of Supervisors on June 30 gave the company permission to operate as a school of special education.



Mark Krikstan, a retired George C. Marshall High School theater teacher, is artistic director of 1st Stage, a new professional theater company that will open soon in Tysons Corner. (Photo by Brian Trompeter)

Krikstan said Supervisor Linda Smyth (D-Providence) has strongly supported the school, which is located in her district.

“The idea is that this is supposed to be an educational opportunity for people interested in acting and the theater,” Smyth said at the June 30 hearing. “And, of course, the only way you can show what you’ve learned is to have a performance.”

The school's founders have benefited from the advice - and discretion - of other local theater companies, Krikstan said.

“People held back on all their horror stories, for fear of crushing our dream,” he said.

Krikstan said he hopes 1st Stage will boost Tysons Corner what Signature Theatre has helped revitalize the Shirlington area in Arlington.

“There's so much talk of Tysons Corner's urban experience, but you can't have a city without the arts,” he said. “We want to help create the city.”

1st Stage will be Fairfax County's first independent professional theater group, Krikstan said.

Community theater groups abound in the county, but the only professional organizations are Wolf Trap, which is operated by the National Park Service, and Theater of the First Amendment, which is supported by George Mason University.

1st Stage will kick off its first season on Sept. 12 with a production of Nikolai Erdman's “The Suicide,” which Krikstan will direct.

Other performances this season will include Charlotte Jones' “Humble Boy,” Edward Bond's “The Sea,” Richard Greenberg's “Violet Hour,” Jason Sherman's “It's All True” and Joe Calarco's “R&J.”

Each show will be performed 20 times over a four-week period.

1st Stage this fall will offer two nine-week theater courses this fall and four such classes next spring, Krikstan said. Next summer, the school will start providing a pair of two-week-long acting courses for high-school-age performers, he said.

Debra Cerie, a 1st Stage board member and fellow retired Marshall High School teacher, said the school will help budding performers earn their acting chops.

Krikstan will be an inspiring force during the school's tough initial years, she said.

“The monetary support when you're getting started is a leap of faith,” Cerie said. “You hope people will find you, come to your performances and continue to support you. I'm encouraged. I always believed Mark could do this.”

*For more information, visit [www.1ststagespringhill.org](http://www.1ststagespringhill.org).*