

Backstage

# A Valiant Second Step for First Stage

By Jane Horwitz

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These are *not* ideal times to be launching a theater company, but Mark Krikstan is forging ahead. First Stage, the nonprofit theater he co-founded in Tysons Corner and of which he's artistic director, is about to open its second show. Richard Greenberg's time-bending literary dramedy, "The Violet Hour," will run Friday through Dec. 14.

First Stage's debut production, a translated Russian comedy called "The Suicide," had some enthusiastic audiences, Krikstan reports, but inauspicious timing: The show opened on Sept. 18, about the time the stock market began to tank. " 'The Suicide' really had meaning for us," he jokes.

On First Stage's Web site (<http://www.firststagespringhill.org>), Krikstan, a retired drama teacher who spent the last 12 years of his career at [Marshall High School](#) in Falls Church, describes the company's mission. He sees it as a "teaching hospital" where young actors can get their first professional experience after college and work alongside more seasoned professionals in an eclectic range of plays. He'd especially like to be able to offer his former students who've chosen careers in theater a showcase.

Krikstan, 57, and his co-founders rented a warehouse/storefront on Spring Hill Road and spent about \$200,000 converting it into a 110-seat theater. Funding came from "a lot of individuals," but Krikstan concedes that the theater is also carrying debt. He adds, however, that he and the theater's board "feel very confident that we can pull ourselves out of it in the next few years."

They're also banking on Tysons Corner evolving into a more urban and cultural setting.

"We have to build our audience, build our community, build individual donors, get them to trust us," says Krikstan. "It's going to be a little slower than we thought in terms of standing on our feet financially. We move forward. What else can you do?"

