

**Location**

Gonzales, TX

**Funding**

\$15,883 USDA Community Facilities Grant  
\$5,000 from the Gonzales Crystal Theater, Inc.  
\$10,000 City of Gonzales Business Improvement Program Grant  
\$3,500 Guadalupe Valley Electric Cooperative

**Partners**

Gonzales Crystal Theatre, Inc.  
Gonzales Youth Center  
City of Gonzales  
Guadalupe Valley Electric Cooperative  
U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rural Development

**Abstract**

The buildings and design of Gonzales, Texas's downtown reflects the Mexican and American influences of the community's past. The significance of Gonzales' downtown historic district is compounded by the presence of Crystal Theatre. Built in 1912, the theatre is home to a dinner theatre and theatre workshops for at-risk teens. In 2010, because the theatre's exterior was in poor condition, Crystal Theatre restored the façade of their building. This USDA funded project invests in a historic downtown asset and supports an exceptional community amenity.

**Project Description**

Gonzales, Texas was born during the tumultuous times of the Texas Revolution and the Mexican-American War. The city was actually first established in the Mexican Territory of Tejas in 1825, but was abandoned after two attacks from Native American groups. The town was quickly rebuilt after the Wars in its original design: seven public squares in the shape of a Spanish cross.

The unique history of Gonzales, now population of just over 7,000, is represented today in its downtown. Many of the community's earliest buildings remain intact. Over 165 original homes, the courthouse, and the old jail still stand in Gonzales' historic downtown, while the public squares are reserved for schools, churches, and public buildings.

One of Gonzales' celebrated downtown buildings, the Gonzales Crystal Theatre, opened in 1917 and was originally called the New Playhouse. For many years, the theatre showed silent films while a pit orchestra played; however, the theatre closed after several decades and the building eventually became derelict.

In the early 1980s, a group of concerned citizens came together to bring theatre back to downtown Gonzales. They created a non-profit organization, Gonzales Crystal Theatre, Inc. (hereafter Theatre, Inc.) and ran a successful dinner theatre in the building for years.

Recently, the Theatre, Inc. entered into an important working relationship with another community organization, Gonzales Youth Center. The Gonzales Youth Center provides safe, after-school care for at-risk children and teens in the area. The two organizations began collaborating on a summer workshop for

18 children from the youth center. The children take part in a two week intensive workshop, culminating in a live performance in the Crystal Theatre.

In 2010, the Theatre, Inc. children's program joined forces with a theatre program at the University of Texas at Austin, Shakespeare at Winedale. Shakespeare at Winedale has a long history of teaching Shakespeare to teens and college-age students. The program works with the executive director of the Crystal Theatre to select a group of the children from the youth center to join the Shakespeare Troupe for the summer. The troupe travels to the Festival of Play in Winedale and to the University of Texas to perform.

Both Theatre, Inc.'s summer workshop and the Shakespeare at Winedale program give at-risk Gonzales students a positive summer experience that builds confidence, public speaking skills, and a love for theatre. The students refine their acting while making connections with University staff. These connections are leading to extraordinary opportunities for Gonzales youth - including opportunities for college scholarships.

The terrible physical condition of Crystal Theatre's exterior was a shameful representation of the vibrancy of the two consequential theatre programs it housed. The executive director and Board of the Crystal Theatre, Inc. focused on restoration of the façade of the theatre. In 2011, Theatre, Inc. received a \$10,000 Main Street façade grant from the City of Gonzales and a \$15,883 grant from USDA Community Facilities. Additionally, Guadalupe Valley Electric Cooperative fixed electrical issues on the front of the building, and the City of Gonzales laid new utility lines near the building.

The Gonzales Crystal Theatre's new façade increases the attractiveness of both the theatre and the rest of downtown. The City of Gonzales is committed to the success of their historic district. Since 1988, Gonzales' downtown has been an Official Main Street. The City has invested \$12,703,860 in its downtown, and 252 jobs have been created in the past 24 years. The City believes that the Crystal Theatre façade renovation has had a positive impact on the downtown and contributes to the City's downtown investment efforts. The renovation of the Crystal Theatre shows value in an existing, unique asset of downtown while supporting the home of invaluable community theatre programs in Gonzales.

### **Livability Principles Addressed**

Supports existing communities. The USDA investment complemented local investment and provided specific improvements to the downtown area of Gonzales.

Value communities and neighborhoods. Many rural towns, including Gonzales, have unique historic features that merit preservation and teach us about our past.

### **Lessons Learned**

Find SUSTAINABLE FUNDING SOURCES to ensure long-term success of a project. Without a steady stream of income, an organization future is in jeopardy.

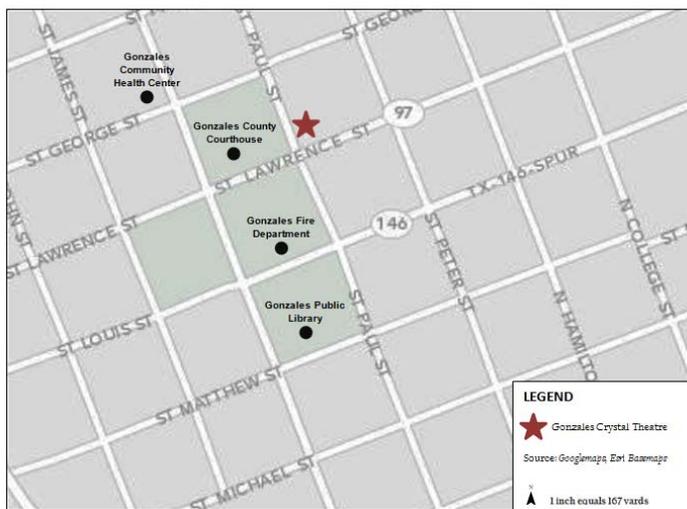
A PARTNERSHIP with a compatible community organization was beneficial to both organizations.

### **Pictures and Maps**



Description: Context Map.

Source: Esri Basemaps, ArcGIS online database (all layer packages by Esri)



Description: DowntownMap – Gonzales, TX

Sources: GoogleMaps, Esri Basemap



Description: The Historic Crystal Theatre

Source: <http://gonzalesmemorialmuseum.com/worldwarlexhibit.html>



Description: Crystal Theatre, 2012

Source: Dorothy Aupperle, Texas State USDA Rural Development Office

### Sources for Textual Information

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Aupperle, D. (2012, July 31). USDA Rural Development Area Specialist, Texas. (A. Murnan, Interviewer)

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