



TACOMA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

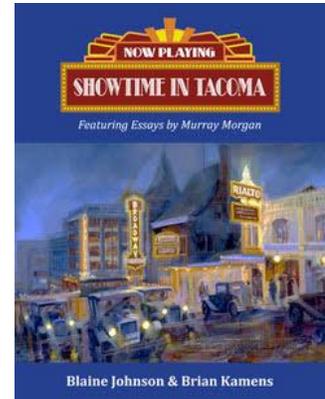
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New Book from Tacoma Historical Society Press

Showtime in Tacoma by Blaine Johnson and Brian Kamens, featuring essays by Murray Morgan. Retail price \$29.99. 244 pages (44 in color) including over 400 images.

Showtime in Tacoma, by Blaine Johnson and Tacoma Public Library's Brian Kamens, covers the theaters, venues, performances and events that have attracted audiences to more than a century's worth of memorable experiences. "This is the story of what and where we watched, what we lost and, most significantly, how these deep-seated roots anchor a dynamic new era in Tacoma's colorful cultural history."

Over 150 theater names have graced the marquees of Tacoma, bringing a wide variety of performers and entertainment through an array of changing technology, while serving as gathering places for Tacoma's growing sense of community and place.



Cover image by Marshall Johnson

Showtime in Tacoma is loaded with historic details and lively tales, including a dozen essays by the late historian Murray Morgan. "We're deeply indebted to Lane Morgan, daughter of Murray and Rosa," said author Blaine Johnson, "for generously making available boxes of materials from Murray's unfinished work. It is particularly satisfying that Murray's rich storytelling about Tacoma's historic theaters now becomes available to a new audience through these essays."

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About Tacoma Historical Society: Tacoma Historical Society is a community-supported volunteer-driven 501(c)(3) charitable, nonprofit corporation, and is dedicated to the preservation, promotion and presentation of the history of the City of Tacoma and its people. Tacoma Historical Society works to forge connections between past and present generations, fostering an appreciation of the past and a sense of place within our community's history.

www.tacomahistory.org

About the Authors

Blaine Johnson

Throughout his adventuresome career, Blaine Johnson identifies two themes that are woven through his varied pursuits - working with words and working with wood. These themes overlay roles he has performed in writing, real estate and community development, construction and management. Many of those activities have been the motivation to co-author Showtime in Tacoma with Brian Kamens.

The “words” started professionally with stints at the Seattle Post-Intelligencer covering the Seattle Sonics and then as Sports Editor. He authored two books from that era, What’s Happenin’? A Revealing Journey Through the World of Professional Basketball, published by Prentice-Hall and Calling the Shots, published by Simon & Schuster. His writing has been recognized with national and regional awards.

He held two positions in the horse racing industry, first as Publicity Director for Longacres Race Track and then as Executive Director for the Washington State Horse Racing Commission. This was followed with a position as Director of Port Relations for the Port of Tacoma. While performing in the latter role, Blaine served on committees and interacted with business and community leaders who were trying to resurrect the Downtown sector during this mid-80s timeframe. When McClatchy purchased the Tacoma News Tribune in 1986, Blaine moved into a position as Assistant Managing Editor, furthering his engagement with the community.

Throughout his roles in the realm of “words”, Blaine restored old houses and commercial buildings. In 1992 he left the TNT to pursue the realm of “wood” fulltime, which led to the building of townhomes in west Tacoma and partnership endeavors to restore the former Savoy Theater on Broadway and convert it into commercial use. This led to the creation of Opera Alley between South 7th and St. Helens. Blaine joined with other partners to convert the former YMCA on Market Street into a residential condominium called the Vintage Y and to construct a mixed use building next door called the Roberson on Ledger Square.

Blaine was the founding president of the Theater District Association, a neighborhood group that raised funds and politically promoted the Broadway LID to develop streetscape enhancements that included Ledger Square and the Ben Gilbert Park on St. Helens. He served on the Asarco Development Strategy Team, negotiated on behalf of the City of Tacoma in the purchase of properties for the Thea Foss Waterway development and serves on the Business Improvement Area (BIA) board. The only time he has been away from Tacoma was a stint as Chief Executive Officer for the Law Offices of Scott Warmuth in San Gabriel, California.

“I was raised primarily in Seattle. I’ve lived in New York City and Los Angeles and a handful of places in between. I’ve been in all 50 states and 49 countries. I travel to explore and learn. I made Tacoma my home when I married my wife, Catherine, 35 years ago. Informed by my experiences elsewhere, I was intrigued by the possibilities I discovered in Tacoma and, more importantly, I was inspired to invest emotionally, financially and strategically in trying to make a difference here.

“I believe in the New Urbanism concepts of developing a culturally diverse, walkable, architecturally appealing, artistically vibrant, historically rooted community. That’s why I am committed to being here and why I wanted to write this book.”

Brian Kamens

If life’s work should be interesting, pursued with passion and meaningful to others, Brian Kamens’ life’s work has and continues to achieve just such a satisfying status. The product of that work has provided a truly remarkable depth of knowledge of Tacoma’s historical character and is the foundation for the stories and details presented in Showtime in Tacoma.

A native of Plymouth, Connecticut, Brian discovered Tacoma while touring the country in 1976 and soon found employment at the Tacoma Public Library, an institution he regards as “a great library system in a fascinating city.”

Brian’s “life’s work” began as a lunch-hour hobby. Library patrons would often ask about the history of their home, but unless they lived in a well-known mansion there was little information to be found. Brian ran across an article in the 1901 Tacoma Daily Ledger with pictures of more than 50 local homes. This inspired him to begin indexing the local papers for house and building news by address.

The research was first entered on 3-by-5 cards which led to a typed version. As popularity for the information grew, the research became part of his regular library activities. As the internet grew, it was a perfect match for putting the building index online, eventually including links to the library’s photograph collection.

In compiling the index, Brian read every Sunday newspaper and scanned every daily newspaper from 1883 to 1966. He continues to add information to the Pierce County Buildings Index, which has reached nearly 70,000 individual addresses and has become an important resource for researchers of all kinds. In developing this resource, Brian offers, “It has been an honor and a privilege to watch the history of the City of Destiny unfold before me in the pages of our local newspapers.”

His activities expand well beyond the dusty bound volumes of yellowed newspapers. Brian was a founder and the first secretary when the Tacoma Historical Society was formed in 1990. He served as the society’s program chair for several years, conducts walking tours and has been in charge of research for the society’s popular annual Historic Homes of Tacoma Tour.

In 2001, Brian was awarded the Tacoma Historical Society’s Murray Morgan Award. In 2003, the American Library Association’s Library Journal named him a national Library Mover and Shaker. In the same year, the Washington State Historic Preservation Office honored him with the Award for Outstanding Achievement in Historic Preservation Education. He is the author of several reports and bibliographies. In 1989, the year of the Washington State Centennial, he was co-author of *To Live in Dignity; Pierce County Labor, 1883-1989*.

Brian currently serves as the Supervisor of the Tacoma Public Library Northwest Room and Special Collections.