

# Vegas Seven January 27 – February 2, 2011



## Paul Beard The Stage Setter

What Paul Beard does as chief operating officer of The Smith Center is almost beyond comprehension to those not deep into the business of building and running half-billion-dollar performing arts centers. For every graspable duty (such as helping to lure *Wicked* to Vegas) there's intricate big-picture stuff ("fusion of capital," "integrated results").

But here is the main thing to know about Beard as the project continues toward its March 2012 grand opening: He's spending a lot of time putting himself in your shoes.

"My role is to keep a razor-sharp focus on the end result," he says. "I'm the end-user."

Beard, who moved from Texas to take the job in September 2009, is in charge of bringing the multipurpose facility to life this year, from hiring the 45-50 full-time staffers who'll move into The Smith Center by December to programming events designed to fill its myriad spaces, including Reynolds Hall (2,051 seats), Cabaret Theater (250), Studio Theater (200) and a two-acre park.

Luckily for Las Vegas, this is what Beard does better than anybody in the business. "He is really good at building ships and setting them off on ambitious journeys," Ed Bass, chairman of Performing Arts Fort Worth, said when Beard resigned after 15 years as managing director of Bass Performance Hall.

His orders this time out are "Bass Hall or better," and Beard, who 20 years ago

also helped open the Kravis Center in West Palm Beach, Fla., thinks that's doable, given lessons learned from the past. But there's another advantage he's not had before: Las Vegas.

"The entire performing arts industry has bought into this idea," he says. "They look at this market of 2 million people and say, 'My God, there's never been a great roadhouse there!'"

The timing couldn't have been better: for Beard, who probably will never again be involved in a project of this magnitude; and for The Smith Center, which was fortunate enough to be well on its way before the Great Recession hit.

"My sense is that it'll be the best of its kind, and in today's world I don't know if it'll be exceeded," says Beard, sitting in a conference room at the center's temporary headquarters in Holsum Lofts downtown, less than a mile from

the construction site. "In the past, places like this that advance the state of the arts were built on the painful and expensive experience of previous projects. But now I wonder who's going to ever have the resources to match what's being accomplished in Las Vegas."

So when he says of 2011, "I probably won't be sleeping much," it's expressed with eager anticipation, not anxiety. His two children are grown and off to college, and he has a wife (Lisa, a performer and arts educator) who understands what years like this entail for the chief operating officer of a performing arts center.

"We call it the Life, with a capital L," he says. "This is the sort of thing where balance isn't a realistic expectation. You throw yourself into it heart, body and soul. Nobody normal would do this. It's too consuming."

— Phil Hagen

