

MEET THE BOARD MEMBERS



STEVE BARTH

Describe your background and career - where did you go to college, what degrees, and career roles?

I grew up in Kearney, Nebraska. I fell in love with performing the moment I hit the stage in third grade as the *Runaway Snowman*. I quickly found myself seizing every opportunity in the arts as I traveled the Midwest to Nebraska Repertory Theater, Minnesota Repertory Theater and Illinois Music Theater. After receiving my BA and MFA in Acting from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, I lived in New York City for eight years acting, directing and producing. I now proudly serve as the Executive Artistic Director of Crane River Theater in Kearney, a professional production company I founded in 2009 with long-time friends Brian Botsford and Brooke Bradford. An educator at heart, I continue to teach workshops and direct productions throughout the country for regional theaters and universities. I am currently the President of Nebraskans for the Arts, a board member for Kearney Cultural Partners, and a past recipient of the Nebraska Arts Council Governor's Arts Award for Emerging Leadership.

Describe a meaningful moment from your career in the arts.

A career in the arts allows for meaningful moments every day, often in the most unexpected ways. Throughout my journey, I have been fortunate to work alongside some incredibly talented artists, but the two people who have shaped my artistic path more than anyone else are my mom and dad. When people ask me why I moved back to Kearney from New York to start Crane River Theater, my answer is always the same: *my mom and dad*. I still vividly remember a moment from fifteen years ago, during the Christmas holiday, when I came home and casually shared an idea with my childhood friends, Brian and Brooke. I mentioned the possibility of producing a theater show in our hometown—a fleeting thought, almost tossed out as a whimsical notion. I briefly mentioned it to my mom before flying back to New York, never imagining how profoundly that conversation would change the course of my life. A month later, I received a phone call from her that still echoes in my memory. She had already spoken with the Kearney Area Community Foundation and Kearney Park & Recreation, and plans were set in motion to launch a theater that summer. In that moment, everything shifted. I immediately called Brian and Brooke to let them know our summer was about

to take a very different turn—we were about to create something together. That summer, I spent three unforgettable months back in Kearney, reconnecting with my hometown, sharing my love for theater with my best friends, and, most importantly, spending precious time with my mom and dad. What I didn't realize then was that summer would become one of the most cherished memories of my life. My mom passed away the following Christmas, but those three months—the laughter, the planning, the quiet moments together —became a gift that I would not have had without Crane River Theater. It was in that season of creation that I was able to share time and love with my mom in ways I hadn't imagined. That summer, that gift, is the moment that will always hold the deepest meaning for me. It wasn't just the start of a theater company—it was the unexpected grace of having those final months together, of creating something that continues to honor the memory of the woman who helped spark it all. That's the magic of the arts: it's never just about the work itself—it's about the people, the connections, and the moments that define us.

What type of arts do you like to be involved in or arts events you continue to support?

Theater is my life. There's something incredibly powerful about the act of stepping into a new story, a new character, a new world with every production. Each show presents an opportunity to explore how our shared stories reflect who we are as individuals and as a community. Whether I'm on stage performing, in the audience observing, or behind the scenes supporting the vision of others, I love theater. My goal is to invite people to share in the journey and to experience the magic that unfolds when we come together to tell a story. It's a fusion of music, dance, visual art, literature, and performance. The music underscores the emotion, the dance elevates the movement, the visual art sets the stage, and the words tie it all together. In that way, theater becomes a celebration of all the arts. I want to contribute in whatever way I can to the continued growth and appreciation of the arts in all their forms.

You are an advocate and proponent of theatre education. Why is theatre participation so important in promoting self-expression and the development of students as well as adults?

I truly believe that the arts bring out the best in all of us. They connect us to each other in a way that is unlike anything else. They transform and inspire our hearts and minds. Every kid should be given the opportunity to learn more about themselves through the power of the arts. We will all be better for it!

What else would you like to share with our members?

I have had the honor of serving on the board for Nebraskans for the Arts for ten years. I have enjoyed every moment. I did not realize the importance of advocacy until I became a part of this amazing organization. The arts would not be possible without the people working to preserve them. We cannot create without the means and resources to do so. I am proud of the work that our state has accomplished for the arts. The work is far from being done, but with the help of Nebraskans for the Arts, Humanities Nebraska, and the Nebraska Arts Council, we are definitely on the right track.