



# Classic Grand Dame Gets Cool Makeover

American women of the Victorian Era did not enjoy the opportunities afforded their male contemporaries. In the age before women's suffrage, most families didn't feel higher education was necessary or proper for young ladies, so they simply did not fund or encourage their daughters to attend college or university. Beside this notion being patently ridiculous and (now) unconstitutional, it left entire generations of young minds yearning for knowledge and curiosity about the world outside their typical experience.

To fill this void, the mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and older sisters of these young women started their own social clubs with the aim of providing tuition-free, ungraded educational experiences in the arts and sciences. One such group was The Wednesday Club, founded by the matrons of St. Louis, MO in 1890 and dedicated to providing local women an outlet for intellectual pursuits. In 1908, due to the generosity of member Mrs. William Bixby, the club was able to move into its own building designed by famed architect Theodore Link,

best known for having designed St. Louis' Union Station.

This new space featured a 500-seat auditorium occupying the first floor, with the second floor designed around a large reception hall complete with a full-service kitchen and ante rooms used for a variety of purposes. The Wednesday Club met and held symposiums, lectures, concerts, and theatrical performances until the 1970s when the space was repurposed as the Learning Center, a place for teacher training and educational innovation under the leadership of educator and founder Emily Richard. Over the next forty years, the Learning Center honored the Wednesday Club's original mission through its own work and by leasing the building out to various educationally minded organizations.

In 2016, a not-for-profit board of directors was appointed to oversee upkeep and use of the building, now re-branded as the Link Auditorium. This new organization seeks to expand on the missions established by



Two of the four Unico air handlers located in the basement. All are equipped with hot water coils for heating.

both The Wednesday Club and the Learning Center by continuing to present educational events and performances for the community at large. In addition to hosting its own events, the Link Auditorium is leased to many St. Louis organizations conducting programs that fulfill its educational mission, including as a theatrical space for a local all-girls high school, a weekly Swing Dance tutorial group, and the annual Tennessee Williams Festival.

### The Challenge

Throughout its 115-year history, the Link Auditorium has continually faced a daunting challenge: dealing with the extreme climate swings of the St. Louis region. Due to its central location in the contiguous U.S., St. Louis sits at the confluence of America's largest weather systems. This means the region experiences the maximum effects of all four seasons. While the spring and fall months are usually temperate, winters can bring extended periods of below-freezing temperatures, while summers often include long-lasting heat waves. Coupled with the area's high humidity rates, the extreme winter and summer temperatures can be particularly brutal.

Since central heating and air conditioning was not widespread at the time of the auditorium's construction, there was no cooling system included and heat was provided through several hot water

radiators located throughout the large performance space and remaining areas, all fed by a central basement boiler. During cold temperatures, the boiler would have to be fired up many hours before a scheduled performance to make the space comfortable for an audience. As there was no way to cool the building during the scorching summer heat, the auditorium simply shut its doors from June through August.

### The Solution

As fate would have it, one of the auditorium's new board members just happened to be the manufacturer of the Unico System, the small-duct central heating and air conditioning system favored by preservationists and the only

HVAC product endorsed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Unico agreed to supply the equipment necessary to bring the turn-of-the-century property into 21st century comfort without detracting from its original, iconic design.

Longtime Unico installer, Unique Heating & Cooling, outfitted the first-floor auditorium and lobby areas with four Unico System air handlers housed in the basement. The flexible supply tubing was snaked through under the stage and all runs terminate in the floor of the auditorium. One-hundred-and-four of the Unico System's unobtrusive round outlets supply quiet, draft-free, even temperatures to the performance area.

### The Results

States Brian Elsesser, president of the auditorium's Board of Directors, "The Unico System is far and away the best climate control option for historical buildings like the Link Auditorium. The smaller Unico ductwork, compact mechanical units, and unobtrusive diffusers

have allowed us to include an HVAC system that has no negative impact on the auditorium's design aesthetics. In addition, it's also a low decibel system that doesn't intrude on performances – the system can be op-

Flexible supply tubing weaves from the basement under the stage of the Link Auditorium.





Outlets ring the stage and seating areas of the first-floor auditorium. 104 outlets silently provide conditioned air to this large, open area.



erating at full force during the quietest of performances without being noticed by the audience at all. Unico understands how critical historic preservation is to our mission and that's why we chose them."

Mr. Elsesser notes that the introduction of the new central HVAC system completes the first phase of a five-year improvement plan that includes roof repairs and an elevator to make the second floor accessible to the disabled.

**Installing Contractor:**

Unique Heating & Cooling

314.647.0604

[www.uniqueheatingcooling.com](http://www.uniqueheatingcooling.com)

The view from the stage. Note that, since the ductwork is located under the seating, there are no impediments to the performance area's ceiling, allowing the space's natural acoustics to function as intended.





A jazz band performs at the Link Auditorium. Even with 104 outlets supply conditioned air at full force The Unico System is completely silent. Audiences feel the superior comfort, but never hear it.



## The Unico System®

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Unico, Inc. is the leader in Small-Duct High Velocity (SDHV) heating and cooling systems and other high-end HVAC systems. The company manufactures all of its products in St. Louis, Missouri, with over 125,000 square feet of modern manufacturing space. The company is well known for extensive use in older, architecturally unique homes and buildings as well as elite, high-end custom homes. The company is family owned and operated and is available throughout the United States and Canada, and in over 28 countries around the world.



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