

Thomas A. Schmidt Charger Community Center

The Thomas A. Schmidt Charger Community Center has a storied history behind its initial use and recent renovations, a history that relates to the presence of two strong colleges, generous citizens and organizations, and community pride.

Carthage College and the College Chapel

Carthage College provided many students with a solid education during its years in Carthage, from 1870-1964. Recognizing the students' desire for a chapel and music hall, the college completed construction on The Mildred Mitchell Music Hall and the Carthage College Chapel in 1952. These buildings were situated adjacent to one another.



The buildings were quickly put to use. The first musical staged in the chapel-music hall, "Brigadoon," took place in 1953. This performance drew a large crowd to Carthage and is said to have created a particularly strong school spirit among students.

First Annual Convention of Circle K

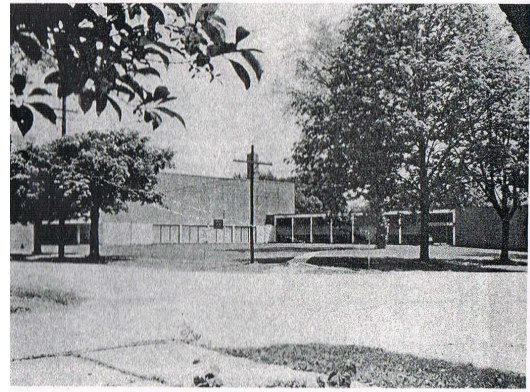
International held at Carthage College Chapel

In October 1947, Carthage College founded the first Circle K International Service Club. This club, which supported community service by college students, was supported by the local Kiwanis Club and grew very quickly. The First Annual Convention of Circle K International took place at Carthage College in Carthage, Illinois during October of 1954. While many buildings on Campus were utilized for the convention, the overall meetings occurred in the College Chapel.

The Circle K Clubs continue to this day to promote service among college students, with memberships on more than 500 college campuses across the world and over 12,000 student members.

Closure of Carthage College

When Carthage College closed, the campus was purchased by Robert Morris College, which used the building as an auditorium until they closed in the late 1980's. The building was then unused and its condition declined significantly.



The Chapel Music-Hall, taken circa 1954

Renovations

The former Carthage College campus was purchased by Prairieland Investment Group, LLC, a Carthage owned and operated company, in 2007. They later donated the building to Carl Sandburg College Foundation. A key exchange ceremony was held in December 2008 to celebrate the donation. The donation allowed Carl Sandburg College to begin a major renovating project on the building, which would now be called the Charger Community Center.

Completed in May 2010, the renovations provide for seating of over 400 people and have equipped the facility to showcase first-class fine arts programs, including plays, musicals, and community theater, as well as family movie nights and conferences. The renovations totaled \$2.9 million. Funding was secured by Carl Sandburg College and the Auditorium Capital Campaign. This Campaign was chaired by Rob Carson of Carson Motors in Carthage and contributed to by numerous generous citizens of the Carthage area. In recognition of his contribution, the center was given the name of Carl Sandburg's out-going president at a ribbon-cutting on June 2, 2010.



Charger Community Center, 2010

REFERENCES

- Lentz, H. (1975). The Miracle of Carthage. History of Carthage College, 1847-1974. Lima: C.S.S. Publishing Co.
- History of Kiwanis: <http://slp.kiwanis.org/CircleK/home.aspx>