

Theatre to upgrade sound and light system

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The city of San Antonio is replacing a 1990s-era sound and light system at the Arneson River Theatre, the malfunctioning bane of performance groups that just wanted to put on a good show at the River Walk venue.

The city and guest performers have long been forced to rent stage equipment for productions at the 800-seat, open-air theater below La Villita.

But come December, they won't have to.

City Council on Thursday OK'd a \$1.34 million contract with San Antonio general contractor AMSTAR Inc. for a revamp, which will include the addition of public Wi-Fi for visitors. Construction is set to begin next month.

Events are scheduled at the theater during the six-month construction period, but city spokesperson Kelly Saunders said the city stopped accepting bookings for additional events, such as weddings and concerts.



Sam Owens/San Antonio Express-News

The Battle of Flowers Association float enters the Arneson River Theatre during the 79th annual Texas Cavaliers River Parade on April 22, 2024, in San Antonio.

City Council also approved a contract with Toro Vertical LLC, which will install a small cell antenna and equipment that will improve 5G cell cov-

erage on the River Walk near the Arneson.

Saunders, who works for the Center City Development and Operations Department, said the Riv-

er Walk has "significant 'dead zones' and connectivity issues" below street level that the company will help address.

The city won't have to

pay anything for its 20-year contract with Toro. Its Atlanta-based parent company, Toro Blanco Group, will install \$78,550 worth of its equipment,

including poles that will house the cell phone antenna.

Toro's revenue comes from cell carriers that contract with the company directly.

"It's exciting to see that space, that's open and free to the public often, is getting a little bit of love right now," said District 1 Councilwoman Sukh Kaur.

The Arneson River Theatre was built by the federal Works Progress Administration, a Depression-era program that transformed cities across the country with construction projects that put locals to work.

The venue opened in early 1940. The Tipica Orchestra, a WPA-sponsored ensemble, was the first group to take the stage, performing a two-hour pre-Fiesta concert on April 28, 1940.

Edwin P. Arneson was a local civil engineer, surveyor and WPA district director who helped make the theater a reality. He died before the project was completed, but the city named venue after him in August 1940.