With a career spanning 40 years in executive management of performing arts centers, professional theatre companies, and museums in Canada and the U.S., Neufeld knows of what he speaks. A Canadian citizen who has an identical twin who lives outside of Toronto, Ken received his BA in theatre and environmental studies from the University of Winnipeg, and his MA in theatre directing and production from MSU in 1976.

"Within a few months of graduating from MSU, I was hired as a stage manager for a dinner theatre in Edmonton, Alberta," Neufeld says. "I worked there and at another professional theatre, got married to my wife, Lesley, and, along the way, realized that I didn't have the inclination to be a director, but that I definitely wanted to be in that theatre environment."

Moving to Vancouver, British Columbia, in 1980, Neufeld worked six years in marketing and fundraising at the Vancouver Playhouse Theatre Company before taking a similar position with the Vancouver Museum and Planetarium Association, and, later, the Gateway Theatre in Richmond, BC.

"As producer and general manager at the Gateway, I was intimately involved in the business side and programming," Ken says, "and it was the first time I was able to draw extensively on what I'd learned in my master's program at MSU."

From there, Neufeld moved to Buffalo, NY, in 1999, taking over the city's resident professional stage institution, the Studio Arena Theatre, with "responsibility for everything that didn't happen on the stage." A highlight of his experience in Buffalo was engineering the Johnny Cash musical *Ring of Fire* that debuted at the Studio Arena and moved on to Broadway.

Hired for current role

A brief break and sabbatical followed, and in May 2009, Neufeld was hired in his current role as president and CEO of Victoria Theatre Association (VTA) and the Arts Center Foundation in Dayton, Ohio. Since then, Ken has introduced several new programs, expanded education and engagement activities, developed new partnerships with Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, and initiated The Next Stage campaign that dramatically increased the size of the organization's endowment.
Neufeld says that what he learned at MSU created the foundation for much of his work over the years, as he received truly broad exposure to literature, various theatre productions, contemporary playwrights, and how it all relates to other parts of the theatre business.

"To characterize my introduction to MSU, it was like drinking from a fire hose," Neufeld says. "Coming from the University of Winnipeg with 1,500 students to MSU with an enrollment of 40,000-plus was a huge culture shock for me. But I found it to be a very collegial environment, and it was an extremely rich and stimulating experience."

Ken has great memories of his time in East Lansing and still has friends from MSU with whom he keeps in contact. He also fondly remembers then Department of Theatre Chair Frank Rutledge, as well as theatre professors Donna Arnick and Gretel Geist.

"On a daily basis, the faculty provided us with a strong base of the fundamentals, always with a focus on maintaining a professional attitude; that understanding that you are a professional. This proved hugely important to me when I became a stage manager right out of the gate soon after receiving my degree."

Ken came back to campus for the first time in 37 years over Labor Day weekend in 2013, and says it was a wonderful experience. He adds that he even stopped by his former graduate student housing at Owen Hall, walked up to the front desk, and jokingly asked if he had any mail.

As for today's students, Neufeld believes they need an opportunity to experience live entertainment, saying there's no substitute for what's happening on a stage. He adds that today's theatre majors need a balance of all types of work, including the classics and the great American plays, along with what's happening now. He cautions them from neglecting what may be considered "old hat."

"It's important to understand the business side of our profession, too," Neufeld adds. "People need to know there's a person at the top who cares and who has a vision. They respond to that."

"And you know that you're making a difference in your community when you're working hard to expose people to theatre, and they come to you and they laugh and they applaud. After all, the business we're in is the quality of life business."

Neufeld adds that, professionally, it was the uniqueness of the Victoria Theatre Association and the Arts Center Foundation business model that attracted him. A Dayton newspaper article quote from when Ken first came to town sums it up:

"There's a multi-faced array of assets that all contribute to operations. Usually in this business, you are totally dependent on two sources of revenue: selling tickets and raising money," [Neufeld] said. "Here, we also run a garage, a restaurant, a ticket center, a catering operation; plus, we're a landlord."

"This job truly fulfills me," Neufeld says. "It's been the ultimate for me to work and live here."