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$2.5M Broadway bailout

City to buy 50,000 tix to help rescue shows hurt by slump

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Despite its own budget problems, the city has pledged to buy $2.5 million worth of theater tickets to help prop up Broadway's sagging sales after the attacks on the World Trade Center.

The money will pay for 50,000 tickets to several plays identified as in financial distress, said Jed Bernstein, president of the League of American Theaters and Producers.

"After Sept. 11, Broadway suffered dramatically," said Bernstein, who appealed to Mayor Giuliani's office for help. "This is to help the shows that are in the most danger of closing."

The ticket purchase comes at a time when Giuliani has announced $766 million in cuts to the city's budget because of a massive budget gap caused by the terrorist attacks.

While mayoral aides called the ticket purchase an investment in the city's faltering economy, advocates for children and the elderly criticized it as ill-conceived.

"I'm stunned at the choices being made in the face of devastating budget cuts," said Gail Nayowith, executive director of the Citizens' Committee for Children, which has estimated children's programs are being cut by $274 million.

"At the same time we don't want the lights to go out on Broadway, we don't want the lights to go out in the libraries, or the schools, or the day care centers," she said.

But Cristyne Lategano-Nicholas, president of New York & Co., the city's tourist board, said the program was badly needed "economic stimulus."

She estimated the 34,000 free tickets would give $7.5 million "right back into the city" in sales.

"The bottom line is spending and saving jobs in the theater, in retail and in restaurants," Lategano-Nicholas said.

About 16,000 tickets to six troubled shows — "Beauty and the Beast." "Contact." "Hedda Gabler." "Les Miserables," "The Music Man" (which is closing Dec. 30) and "The Phantom of the Opera" — already were given to various charities and rescue workers at Ground Zero this month as thanks for their help, a mayoral spokesman said.

The other 34,000 tickets will be part of a promotion in January and February called Spend Your Regards to Broadway, run by New York & Co.

Designed to stimulate shopping and eating in city stores and restaurants, the program promises two free Broadway theater tickets to shoppers who present $500 worth of receipts at the tourist board headquarters (810 Seventh Ave.) after Jan. 2.

Bernstein said new shows would be added to the program next month, but would not say what they would be.

STAYING ALIVE



The city is buying more than 50,000 tickets a week to these six Broadway shows to help them stay afloat:

- **"Beauty and the Beast"**
- **"Contact"**
- **"Hedda Gabler"**
- ***"Les Miserables"***
- **"The Music Man"**
- ***"The Phantom of the Opera"***

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