**Volunteer Manual (Updated 10/2023)**

I am thrilled that you have chosen to volunteer with the Ford Center for the Performing Arts. Volunteers are a vital part of each event the Ford Center hosts. Volunteers help us connect to the Ole Miss and Oxford community. I hope that you find the duties to be fulfilling and that your volunteer experience with us is rewarding and positive. The following information package includes details about the Ford Center and the roles and responsibilities of our volunteers. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me. Once again, welcome and thank you!

Michelle Cook

Front of House Manager

Ford Center for the Performing Arts

[Mlcook5@olemiss.edu](mailto:Mlcook5@olemiss.edu)

662-915-2859

406-600-7285 (cell)

**About the Ford Center:**

**Mission:**

The Gertrude Castellow Ford Center for the Performing Arts shall enrich the intellectual and cultural environment of the University of Mississippi and the region by providing a venue for programming in performing arts, public affairs and the humanities. The Ford Center will complement the University’s commitment to excellence in education, research and service while celebrating imagination, innovation and creativity.

**History:**

The Gertrude C Ford Center for the Performing Arts officially opened on Friday, March 28, 2003 with an inaugural gala hosted by Robert C Khayat, Chancellor of the University of Mississippi and starring Morgan Freeman as master of ceremonies.

The Ford Center became a reality in 1998 with a gift of $20 million from the Gertrude C Ford Foundation. The State of Mississippi contributed $500,000 for initial planning followed by an appropriation of $10 million for construction of the Ford Center. The construction was completed in December of 2002.

**Impact:**

The Ford Center hosts an average of 150 events annually. It is the centerpiece of the University’s cultural and scholarly mission to present the finest in the performing arts and visiting lectures.

**Ford Center Staff:**

Julia Aubrey – Director

Matt Zerangue – Technical Director

Kate Meacham – Marketing

Michelle Cook – Front of House Manager

Jennifer Pardoe – Box Office Supervisor

Maura Langhart – Annual Giving Director

Max McDonaldson – Performing Arts Technician (sound)

Whitley O’Neal – Performing Arts Technician (lighting)

Rose Brown – Staff Assistant/Hospitality

Virginia Kerrigan – Box Office Assistant

**Hours of Operation:**

The Ford Center is open Monday thru Friday from 8am to 5pm. If an event is in the weekday evening, the building will typically stay open thru approximately 30 minutes after the event. Weekend hours are event driven, but the building is typically open 90 minutes prior to the start of an event and closes approximately 30 minutes after an event ends.

The Box Office is open Monday thru Friday from 10am to 4pm. For weekday evening events, the Box Office will stay open until about 15 minutes after the start of an event. For weekend events, the Box Office will open an hour prior to the event and remain open until about 15 minutes after the start of an event. Tickets can be ordered online at FordCenter.org at anytime.

**Parking:**

The University Parking department requires cars parked on campus Monday thru Friday from 8am to 5pm to have a parking permit. For events during the weekday, you will receive an email informing you of the parking situation. Either parking restrictions for the Ford Center lot will be relaxed during the event or you will be instructed on how to receive a permit.

For touring shows, volunteers are issued a permit in our Gertie Lot. This lot is also for our Friends of the Ford Center. Make sure you do not park in a spot marked “Reserved Parking” as those are for the Friends.

Please note that any relaxation of parking requirements will only apply to Ford Center lots for a specific period of time. If you park elsewhere on campus, or past the time of the easement, you will need to secure a parking permit or risk a ticket.

**Confidentiality:**

The Front of House Manager will maintain volunteer names, email addresses and phone numbers. The Manager will also keep a record of events with volunteer hours and positions. All information will be kept confidential.

**Communication:**

You can contact the Front of House Manager, Michelle Cook, at [mlcook5@olemiss.edu](mailto:mlcook5@olemiss.edu), 662-915-2859 (office) or 406-600-7285. Messages can also be sent via Sign Up Genius. Contact for other Ford Center staff can be found at <https://fordcenter.org/about/ford-center-staff/>.

**Media:**

If you are contacted by the media in regards to the Ford Center, please refer them to Julia Aubrey (662-915-6669) or Kate Meacham (662-915-6502).

**Volunteering:**

Thank you for volunteering at the Ford Center! It is because of your time and dedication we are able to put on the variety of events we do for the Ole Miss, Oxford and surrounding communities. Not only do you welcome guests to the campus and building, you are there to assist, whether simply by answering a question or by directing people on how to exit the building in an emergency.

There is no minimum or maximum number of events you need to work. If you do not volunteer for an entire semester, you will automatically be removed from the volunteer list unless you contact the Front of House manager. You sign up for the events that work with your schedule and interest you. Ushers are able to watch for free the events they work.

People volunteer for a variety of reasons: to make new friends, to learn something new, to get out of the house, to see events for free, because they need community service hours. Whatever your reason, we hope volunteering at the Ford Center fulfills that reason.

If you have any suggestions or ideas on how to improve the volunteer experience or suggestions for shows, please share with the Front of House Manager. Please know that some shows are just too big or expensive for the Ford Center, for example, Taylor Swift.

If you have friends who are interested in becoming a volunteer, have them contact Michelle at [mlcook5@olemiss.edu](mailto:mlcook5@olemiss.edu) or fill out the volunteer information form at https://fordcenter.org/support/volunteer/.

**Signing-up for an event:**

Sign-up for events via Sign Up Genius or GIvePulse. Give Pulse is the Ole Miss volunteer portal. Not all events will be listed on Give Pulse, but they will all be listed on Sign Up Genius. Approximately, once a week, an email will be sent via Sign Up Genius with the events we are currently seeking volunteers for. Events will posted approximately a month prior to their date. You are able to add notes to your sign-up if there is something you want the House Manager to know or take into account. Students who sign up in Give Pulse will automatically have their sign up transferred over to Sign Up Genius. Students will be able to submit their hours in Give Pulse for credit no matter if they signed up via Sign Up Genius or Give Pulse. Once a student submits their hours for verification, an email is sent to the House Manager for them to verify the hours are correct.

When you log onto Sign Up Genius, you will see the event name, a brief description of the event, the date of the event and the time of the shift. Please note the end time is approximate based on the information we receive from the event. The various positions needed for each event will be listed as well as how many are needed at each position. Please note that positions may be added or changed as we receive more information about the event. Sign up for the position you would like to work. ***However, the House Manager reserves the right to switch the position you work.***

Your arrival time or “call time” is listed on the Sign-Up Genius event listing. Typically, they are one hour prior to the start of the event. Please verify your account is on the Central time zone by going under “settings” under the circle with your initials or photo in the upper right corner.

*If you must cancel a sign up, please do so no later than 3 hours before your shift. You can do that via Sign-Up Genius or by contacting Michelle at* [*mlcook5@olemiss.edu*](mailto:mlcook5@olemiss.edu) *or 406-600-7285.*

**Dress Code:**

Please wear black pants or skirt and a white shirt or top. It can get chilly in the building, so feel free to being a sweater or jacket. As you will be standing for an hour or more, please make sure you are wearing comfortable shoes. You can store any personal belongings in the House Manager’s office. There are bookshelves, baskets and hangers for your use. Name badges (or VOLUNTEER badges) should be worn during your shift. Please leave them on the ribbons on the white board when you leave.

**Arriving for an Event:**

If an event is between 8am and 5pm on a weekday, you will be given instructions on where to park or you will be provided a parking pass. This information and passes are usually sent via email the day prior to the event. If your shift is in the evening after 5pm or on a weekend, park in the lots by the Ford Center. If there is another high traffic event on campus (i.e. baseball game), you will be sent further instructions/details on where to park.

Once you arrive, please report to the house manager’s office which is located across the hall from the Box Office. You should read the white board located in the office for information, pick-up your name tag, leave the personal belongings you don’t want on you, sign -in, see what your position is and where you should sit during the event, grab a cheat sheet (if needed) and flashlight (if needed). Then wait by the benches outside the house manager’s office for the event briefing. During the event briefing, you’ll learn more of the details of that event. Once the briefing is over, you should report to your post. As we communicate during an event via cell phone, you are allowed to have your cell phone with you during the event. Please keep personal use of your phone to a minimum.

**Positions:**

Greeter:

Greeters are the first Ford Center staff members our guests see at an event. You will greet patrons, check their tickets and direct them to the appropriate entrance into the theatre. You will answer questions and keep an eye out for any issues. Greeters should utilize any cheat sheets provided for an event to help with their responsibilities.

Orchestra Right (OR) and Orchestra Left (OL):

Orchestra Right (OR) and Orchestra Left (OL) are the two entrances into the theatre on the main level. Your main responsibilities are helping patrons find their seats, handing out programs, answering questions and keeping an eye on things in the main theatre. To the best of your availability, given the traffic, escort patrons to their seats (if reserved) or give a good description (Row C is the third row from the bottom and you are 4 seats in from this aisle). If two volunteers are working the entrance, try to keep one at the inner door to check tickets to make sure people are at the correct entrance and distribute programs. Our goal is to keep traffic flowing while also providing as much personal customer service as possible and ensuring people are in their correct seats.

Please only open the 1st and 3rd doors. The middle door presents a possible hazard. We cannot block this door with chairs or signs. The middle door will remain locked so it cannot be used as people enter but can be used as people exit.

For some touring shows, cables will be run across the entrance into the hall. They will be covered by a small carpet and covered with reflective tape. Ushers should point out this “bump”, particularly as people are leaving, to prevent people from tripping on it.

Parterre Right (PR) and Parterre Left (PL):

Parterre Right (PR) and Parterre Left (PL) are the two entrances into the theatre on the second level. The seats in this level begin with row T on the main level of seating. Your main responsibility is helping patrons find their seats, handing out programs, answering questions and keeping an eye on things in the main theatre. To the best of your availability, given the traffic, escort patrons to their seats or give a good description (Row T is the row behind the railing and you are 4 seats in from this aisle).

Parterre volunteers need to make sure that patrons are not walking across the sound platform. The only way in and out of the rows on the parterre are the two aisles. While it appears that there may be a way in to the seats by the sound platform, there are not steps down to the rows, there are giant drops from one row to another. If a patron entered the parterre level from the wrong side, they should be directed to enter the other side by going downstairs and around to the other side.

Mezzanine Right (MR) and Mezzanine Left (ML):

Mezzanine Right (MR) and Mezzanine Left (ML) are the two entrances into the theatre on the third level. Your main responsibility is helping patrons find their seats, handing out programs, answering questions and keeping an eye on things in the main theatre. To the best of your availability, given the traffic, escort patrons to their seats or give a good description (Row C is the third row from the bottom and you are 4 seats in from this aisle). If patrons have entered the level on the wrong side, please direct them down the hall to the other entrance.

The mezzanine level has many of our boxes on it. The seats in the boxes are not numbered, but seat 1 will be the seat closest to the stage. Boxes 5 and 14 (the boxes furthest from the stage) are used for accessible seating (ADA) needs. If it is a ticketed event, the tickets will reflect if the patrons’ seats are in the box. If it is an unticketed event, you will be given instructions on if patrons can sit in the boxes.

Balcony Right (BR) and Balcony Left (BL):

Balcony Right (BR) and Balcony Left (BL) are the two entrances into the theatre on the fourth level. Your main responsibility is helping patrons find their seats, handing out programs, answering questions and keeping an eye on things in the main theatre. To the best of your availability, given the traffic, escort patrons to their seats or give a good description (Row C is the third row from the bottom and you are 4 seats in from this aisle). If patrons have entered the level on the wrong side, use your best judgment – either direct them down to the mezzanine level to go across and up the stairs to the other side, or let them cut across an empty row of seats.

Concessions:

For our touring shows, we may be selling concessions (snacks and drinks) out of the concessions stand next to the house manager’s office. Concessions workers sell these items prior to the event and during intermission. Concessions workers will count the money prior to starting to sell and after intermission. All items are $2 and we accept cash and credit card (Mastercard and Visa). Please note that only water and wine in Ford Center wine glasses are permitted into the theatre.

Merchandise:

For our touring shows, we may be asked to sell merchandise for the show. Michelle and the volunteers will work with the show on what this will entail. Merchandise sales are usually done prior to the show, during intermission and after the show. You may need to count a cash box before sales begin and once sales conclude.

Floater:

You may be asked to roam or “float” a certain area of the building (ie mezzanine lobby between the two entrances) assisting patrons find the correct entrance, answering questions, and keeping an eye on things. Specifics will be given to you during briefing.

All Positions Prior to, During and After Event:

Keep an eye on the crowd looking for any patron that might need assistance or anything out of the ordinary or suspicious. If you see something that seems “off”, say something to a Ford Center staff member. If a patron is ill or falls, please use your best judgment. If the situation is serious enough, ask the patron or the people with them if they would like you to call an ambulance. Then contact Michelle or a Ford Center staff member. Do not move a fallen or injured patron unless necessary to prevent further injury. Please fill out an incident report located in the House Manager office on the sign-in table after the patron has been assisted and the situation is over.

After the event, please check the seating areas for trash and lost and found items. Lost and found items should be put in the lost and found cubby in the House Managers office and the lost and found form filled out. The form is located in the house manager’s office on the sign-in table.

Only water and wine in Ford Center cups is allowed into the theatre.

Usher chairs are provided at each entrance. For the larger shows, those who are greeting, selling concessions or merchandise, will be assigned an entrance to sit in. Please check to see where you are assigned to sit. Ushers should not be sitting in the main hall seats, particularly for ticketed events as you may be sitting in a seat someone has purchased.

**Building Layout:**

House Right – The side closest to the circle driveway and elevators.

House Left – The side with the restrooms and near the administrative offices.

Levels of the Theatre:

Orchestra – level one, closest to the stage. Rows A thru S, with row A closest to the stage

Parterre – level two, right behind Orchestra. Rows T thru X, with row T closest to the stage

Mezzanine – level three, above Orchestra and Parterre, with row A closest to the stage

Balcony – level four, above Mezzanine, with row A closest to the stage

Level/Floor Access:

On the Parterre and Balcony levels, there is no walkway from house right to house left. You must go up/down a level in order to walk across. It is very important for guests on these levels to be directed to the best way to access their seats.

Seat Numbers:

Seats are numbered from house right to house left. Another way to think of it: if you are standing on the stage, Left is Low, so seat 101 will be on the left side and seat 127 will be on the right side of the section.

**Orchestra Level:**

Seats 101 – 114: Patrons are encouraged to enter House Right

Seats 115 – 128: Patrons are encouraged to enter House Left

**Parterre, Mezzanine and Balcony Levels:**

Seats 101 – 119: Patrons are encouraged to enter House Right by taking the elevator or stairs by the elevator

Seats 120 – 138: Patrons are encouraged to enter House Left by taking the stairs closest by the administrative offices or taking the elevator up to the mezzanine level and taking the stairs closest by the administrative offices.

Boxes:

Ushers are not to sit in boxes while watching a performance.

**Boxes 1 – 9 are House Right**:

Box 1 – Orchestra Level

Boxes 2 – 5 – Mezzanine Level

Boxes 6 – 9 – Balcony Level

**Boxes 10 – 18 are House Left:**

Box 10 – Orchestra Level

Boxes 11 – 14 – Mezzanine Level

Boxes 15 - 18 – Balcony Level

Accessible (ADA) Seats:

There are two seats on each end of row J in the orchestra level that are for accessible seating. They are the red seats that can be moved in and out of the seating area.

On the mezzanine level, there are 3 seats on each end of row A that can be used as accessible seats.

Boxes 5 and 9 can also be used as accessible seats.

If we have a full house and need to accommodate more wheelchairs, we may be able to place them along the railing at Orchestra Right or Orchestra Left.

When assisting disabled or elderly patrons, offer to help, but DO NOT touch them or their wheelchairs/walkers/canes without patrons asking you for such assistance. The best thing to do is to hold out your forearm for the patron to hold onto.

There is a wheelchair in the house manager’s office if a patron needs assistance getting from one area of the building to the other. The patron cannot stay in the wheelchair for the entire performance, as it may be needed for another patron. Please note that it is sometimes easier for a wheelchair to be backed over (backwards) a cable cover than to be pushed forward over the cables.

Assisted listening devices are available at the UM Box Office. They should be returned to a staff member or left in the ticket window after the show.

Service animals are allowed in the building. Emotional support animals are not allowed into the building. You may ask the patron what service does the animal provide. If the answer is emotional support, kindly tell the patron that the animal is not allowed into the building. Remember that not all disabilities are visible.

**Emergency Information:**

First Aid kits are located in the House Manager’s Office, Concessions Stand, Box Office and Administrative Office.

A wheelchair is available in the House Manager’s office if needed.

Weather Emergency Internal Safe Havens:

*Groups under 20:* Conference Room located by administrative offices. There is no emergency power circuit in this room.

*Large groups:* Public audiences, staff and volunteers should gather in the main hall and remain there until the weather emergency has been cancelled. If people need to use the restroom, they should only use the House Left doors and only if absolutely necessary. NO ONE should use any house right lobbies.

The basement area of the Ford Center is also a safe haven. The Studio Theatre has windows, so should not be used during a weather emergency.

Building Evacuation

If the building is to be evacuated, remain calm and listen for instructions from a Ford Center staff or emergency personnel. These may come in the form of text messages. Please assist all patrons out before leaving the building yourself. Check the restrooms for any patrons.

Those on the Orchestra and Parterre levels should exit the sides of the building and gather in the parking lot adjacent to the Depot (north of the building).

Those on the Mezzanine and Balcony levels should exit the third floor doors and gather at the Rose Garden on University Ave (southwest corner of building). If that area needs to be cleared, progress towards campus.

There are emergency exit stairwells that run straight down from the Balcony to the Orchestra level on each side of the auditorium. These can be used in an emergency or if the lobbies on any floor is obstructed and unusable.

Do not re-enter the building unless directed to by an emergency personnel or Ford Center staff. Stay in contact with your fellow volunteers so we can keep track of everyone.

**Miscellaneous Items:**

The safety of our patrons, volunteers and staff is priority number one for all of us. If you see something, say something to a Ford Center staff member. If a patron is ill, falls, or lets you know something is broken or not working properly, please let a staff member know. Do NOT attempt to move an individual who has fallen unless the person is in danger of further injury. Once help arrives, try and keep the area clear of traffic. We also have incident report form in the house manager’s office for you to complete after the situation has been addressed.

We are often the first “staff” that people meet at Ole Miss. Please make sure you are greeting people, thanking people, even a simple hello. We know that you may not always get treated with kindness and respect back, but we want to make sure we are welcoming all of our guests.

When showing a patron to a location, use an open hand to direct. Try not to point.

Patrons may NOT access the stage at any time unless special permission has been given to these individuals. If unsure, ask the House Manager. Ford Center staff, particularly the Tech Crew, have unlimited access to any part of the building at any time.

UM Box Office:

The box office is located on the orchestra level, across from the concessions stand. They are open Monday thru Friday from 10am – 4pm. Depending on the event, they will be open one hour prior to the start of the event until the event begins. Ticket purchases and “will call” tickets can be taken care of at the box office.

We do not sell standing room only tickets. Every person in the Ford Center must be in a seat according to fire code regulations. There should be no sitting on the stairs.

Restrooms:

Orchestra Level – in the center of the lobby, between House Right and House Left

All other levels – at house left. Patrons on parterre and balcony right will need to go up or down a level to access the restrooms.

Food and Drink:

Concessions may be sold during touring shows or bigger events. Concessions will be sold prior to the show and during intermission. Candy, snacks, water and Coke products will be sold for $2.

Wine may be sold during touring shows or bigger events. Wine is served in Ford Center wine cups. Patrons may bring back their wine cups to other events where they may purchase a wine refill..

NO Food and Drinks are allowed inside the theatre except for Ford Center wine cups and water. Please enforce this rule.

Light Locks:

When you enter any floor from the lobby, you will have to go through the light lock before you enter the main hall. These dimmer spaces are designed for two reasons:

1. To keep light from the lobby out of the main hall
2. To allow your eyes to gradually adjust from bright lobby light to a darker main hall

Programs will often be found on the program cards located in the light locks.

We thank you for the time and energy you give to the Ford Center. We know there are a variety of ways you can spend your time and we are honored you choose to spend it with us. If you would like a backstage tour, please let me know and we will try and arrange one. If you have any suggestions on training you would like to see, improvements we can make, or shows you think would be a good fit, please let me know. I can be reached at mlcook5@olemiss.edu , 662-915-2859 or 406-600-7285.