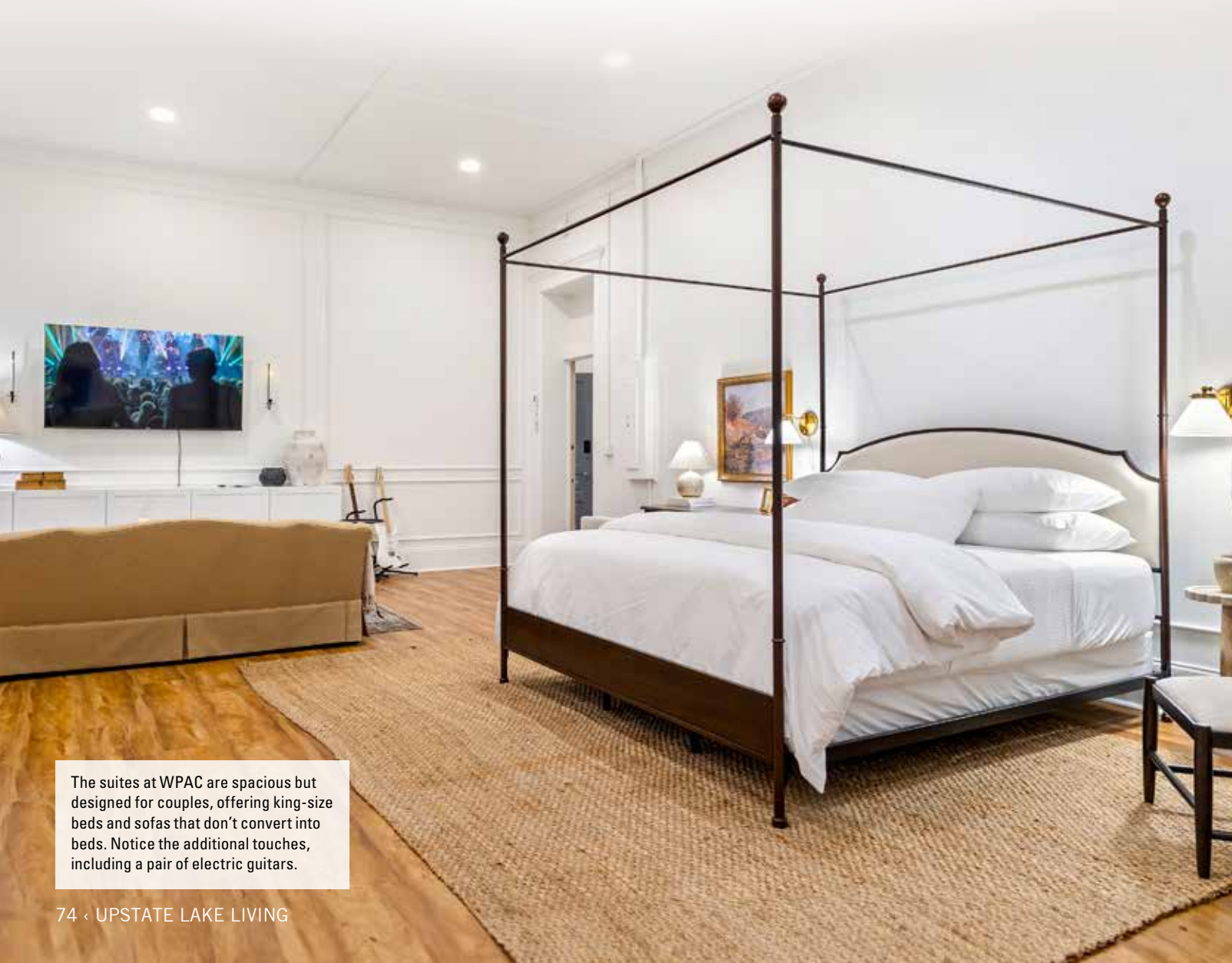


# Take a course in hospitality at WPAC

story by Brett McLaughlin | photos courtesy of Keowee Creative



The suites at WPAC are spacious but designed for couples, offering king-size beds and sofas that don't convert into beds. Notice the additional touches, including a pair of electric guitars.

There's a *very* long history of education at the corner of College and North Broad streets in Walhalla. That's why it should come as no surprise that visitors — and locals alike — can now take hospitality classes at that corner ... well, sort of.

The Walhalla Performing Arts Center, a destination for thousands of music, comedy and entertainment patrons each year, is now offering its own, unique form of overnight accommodations.

From former student classrooms on the second floor of the historic facility, the WPAC has created a pair of 750-square foot suites complete with master bathrooms and full kitchenettes.

"The real beauty of this is that, if you're coming for a performance, you don't have to worry about transportation or parking. Your room is literally steps away from the theater," said WPAC Executive Director Mark Thompson. "You can even book two nights and spend the day hiking trails, visiting waterfalls or shopping two or three blocks away."

While the White and Green Suites are different in design and décor, they are identical in that they are spacious (32 x 24 feet) but crafted for couples. Each has a king-size bed and a comfortable sofa that, as Thompson notes, does not pull out. There are flat screen TVs, internet connections, desks and a host of small amenities usually reserved for accommodations costing much more.

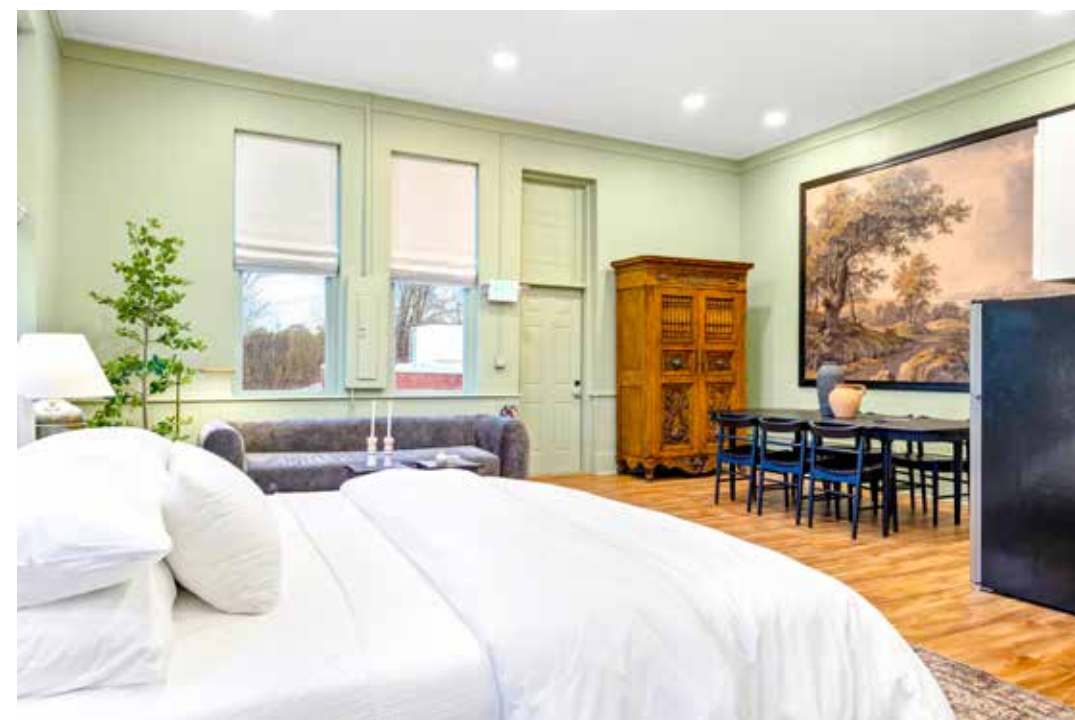
"We're not affiliated with any booking sites," Thompson noted. "That means we don't have a lot of added fees. We charge \$275. There are no cleaning fees or third-party fees, and the state and local taxes are included."

The rooms are made unique by the attention that was given to maintaining the historic character of the building despite the sometimes radical renovations the 123-year-old former grade school required.

## EDUCATION ON THE CORNER

Even before the current structure was built in 1903, another building near the corner of College and North Broad streets was home to Newberry College during most of its 9-year hiatus from the city whose name it bears.

The college had been established by German



Lutherans in 1856. However, during the Civil War and in its aftermath, enrollment fell and debts mounted. Attracted by the heavily German population of Walhalla, the school moved but retained its name in 1868. The following year it sold its Newberry building and other property at auction to pay off its debts. In 1877, the Lutheran Synod of S.C. and Adjacent States voted to move the college back to Newberry.

Originally, the current structure was a grade school. Additions were made over the years, including an eastern wing and the auditorium, built between 1913 and 1914. In the 1950s, a

{top} The Green Suite features modern décor with classic historic touches such as chair rail, a beadboard ceiling and traces of transoms over the fire exit.

{above} The new suites at Walhalla Performing Arts Center are loaded with amenities, including complete kitchenettes and full baths.



classroom was added to the rear of the auditorium to provide more educational space.

The building operated as a school until 1980 and then served as the offices for the school district from 1981 through 1992, when it was abandoned.

Led by a pair of former educators — Jean Phillips and Maxie Duke — a group of citizens quickly began discussing how to save the historic facility. In 1993, the Walhalla Auditorium Restoration Committee was created, obtained a lease from the school and a 501(c)3 designation from the IRS. The arduous process of fundraising and restoration began and continued for 10 years. In August 2003, pianist Emile Pandolfi played the Center's first performance to a full house.

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The past two decades have witnessed countless other improvements resulting in a state-of-the-art music and entertainment venue as well as a spacious welcoming center/conference room (The Founders Room) that hosts community groups and non-profits at no cost.

However, the most recent renovations on the previously untouched second floor proved

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Walhalla Performing Arts Center now offers overnight accommodations for patrons coming to take in music, comedy and entertainment performances.



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For more than two decades, WPAC has been a state-of-the-art venue for a wide variety of talented performers.

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to be a \$1 million undertaking.

"The fact we were able to become listed on the National Register of Historic Places, made it possible for us to obtain some matching grants (25 percent raised locally) that we really needed for flooring, windows, and electrical and plumbing work," Thompson said.

Originally, the second floor contained five classrooms and one small bath. After the students left, the classrooms were further divided. Converting the space into two suites for start-up businesses and two guest suites, each with a bath, was no small undertaking.

"There were layers of vinyl flooring, paint and wall coverings. We wanted to stay true to the period in which the building was built, but it wasn't easy," Thompson said, noting retained beadboard ceilings, chair rails and transoms over the doors.

The new suites are not only a dramatic addition to an historic venue, but a great place to experience a course in hospitality. ■

*Because WPAC does not use third-party booking sites, reservations for the new guest rooms can only be made through the venue's website, [walhallapac.com](http://walhallapac.com).*



Built at the turn of the century as a grade school, this is now the Walhalla Performing Arts Center, an entertainment venue that just expanded to include overnight accommodations.

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