

## Illinois Shakespeare Festival Backgrounder

The Illinois Shakespeare Festival is a professional repertory company that produces three plays and stages multiple activities for the community, all while teaching the works of William Shakespeare. The festival, founded in 1977, has been held primarily at the Ewing Cultural Center on the grounds of Ewing Manor in Bloomington, Illinois. Ewing Manor was once the home of world traveler and philanthropist Hazle Buck Ewing and her husband, Davis Ewing. The manor was gifted to the Illinois State University Foundation by Hazle Buck Ewing before she died with specific instructions for how the residence to function as a center for promoting cultural understanding and acceptance to continue her promotion of international friendships.

Since then, the Illinois Shakespeare Festival has been entertaining guests on the manor's front lawn, court yard, and in the Ewing theatre, an outdoor theatre seating 438 guests. The theatre's design was meant to replicate Shakespeare's Globe Theatre. The Illinois Shakespeare Festival provides live music and mini performances of Shakespeare's works before each performance. All but two of Shakespeare's plays have been put on since the opening of the theater. Tours of the theatre and Manor are also available. The Center for the Performing Arts building on the Illinois State University campus is also a production location.

Hazle Buck Ewing's wishes were made true by the Illinois Shakespeare Festival. The company has reached out and shared their mission of cultural education and acceptance. The festival draws in 10,000 visitors each summer. People of all ages are invited to enjoy the performances and picnic on the lawn any time. The community is invited to experience the festival through summer camps, acting classes, and by participating in a children's production of all the main shows being put on that summer session. College students have the option to become an intern and be educated by professional actors and star alongside them in play productions and assist in teaching classes. The festival has made a big impact on the community and gives outsiders a spark of interest. Within everything that is offered, understanding and acceptance of others through international friendships has been achieved.