

WILLOW CREEK  
COMMUNITY CHURCH  
ARCHITECT PASMA GROUP



# SPACE EFFICIENT SEATING

REPRINTED FROM CHURCH EXECUTIVE MAGAZINE, DEC. 05

Article written by Jeff Carrol

In the latter part of 2004 Willow Creek Community Church, serving more than 20,000 worshipers per week, moved into their new 7200-seat facility in South Barrington, Illinois. It is no surprise that Willow would approach the selection of their seating source with serious intent. The seating is one of the most highly visible, highly functional aspects of a worship setting, and leaders know their congregations take a little more personal interest in what they will be sitting on, for decades to come, than they do in such things as bricks and mortar.

In the case of Willow Creek, the total cost of the seating represented only about one and one half percent of the total building budget. "This is not a place where you want to cut corners," says Scott Troeger, director of campus operations and development at Willow Creek. "We looked at about six companies before narrowing the field down to two that could best meet our requirements." Willow ultimately selected the Celebration chair from SERIES. The company is headquartered in Miami, Florida with a national marketing office located in Warsaw, Indiana. "We even visited SERIES, main manufacturing facility in Bogota, Colombia to see first hand the production capabilities, quality and people behind the product," says Troeger.

"From a comfort point of view, it exceeded our expectations with what we were looking for, and from the value side, we thought it was the best engineered seat we had seen." -Scott Troeger

"We were very impressed." SERIES is one of the few companies within their specific industry that is ISO 9001:2000 certified in design, manufacturing and sales. "We lived with theater seating for 25 years in our previous auditorium, and looked at maintenance, comfort, durability and aesthetics," says Troeger. "We learned some lessons and knew some things we didn't want to repeat, and one of them was maintenance."

## Self-lifting Seat is Silent

The decision makers were impressed with the gravity lift seat that was both quiet and maintenance free. "The SERIES seat had no springs that could wear out or break," says Troeger. "From a comfort point of view, it exceeded our expectations with what we were looking for, and from the value side, we thought it was the best engineered seat we had seen." Ron Ogden, vice president of marketing for SERIES, expands on this issue of value. "If a product distinctive is to translate to value it must produce benefits," he says. "True innovation is much more than the introduction of something new. It has to fill a need and provide real benefits to the market not being provided by others."

## Filling A Need

SERIES approached the church market in 1999, after 20 years of successful service to a variety of seating markets. "We wanted to bring performing arts standards, at reachable prices, to a market that was being offered only the kind of chairs normally sold to cinemas and high school auditoriums," says Ogden. He points out that cinemas and k-12 schools typically purchase chairs characterized by injected plastic exteriors on the rear side of the back and the under side of the seat, which create a colder, more institutional appearance. These plastic covers also tend to scratch or scar in response to surface abuse and take up more space, which compromises seat capacity, traffic flow and maintenance. SERIES has streamlined and standardized their operation to produce only performing arts finishes including wood, fabric and laminates.

## Stewardship Sensitive

Mauricio Olarte, CEO and founder of the SERIES company, has earned international recognition over the past quarter century for innovating seating products that conserve space and reduce cost of ownership. Consequently, SERIES has a great deal to say to churches about the relationship between stewardship and space. "Our product is engineered with a commitment to the value of space efficiency," says Ogden. "This has set new standards by which this market estimates value. Our market is becoming more and more in tune to what performing art centers have always valued in a product that has a self lifting seat;

namely the fact that it provides more seats per square foot of building and more efficient traffic flow than any other type of seating product. Real estate isn't getting any cheaper. Investing in a product that maximizes seats per square foot is simply good stewardship."

### Longer Rows - Between Fewer Aisles & More Seats

A typical pew or stack chair is 24" deep from the rear of the back to the front of the seat. This allows only 12" of egress (room to exit) between rows at normal 36" row-to-row spacing. With a minimum 12" egress, fire codes restrict the allowable number of seats per row to 15. The patented seat lift on the SERIES product opens the egress from 12" to 20". (The average theater seat provides only 15".) This additional 8" of passage area extends the maximum number of seats per row to 40. By these statistics, fire codes acknowledge the advantage of the SERIES product in providing more than double the traffic flow efficiency of a stack chair or conventional pew.

These longer rows provide the potential to eliminate as many as half the vertical aisles throughout the seating area, which converts substantial added floor space to seating. Ogden points out that in an auditorium designed to seat 1,000 people, the SERIES products will free up 1,200 square feet of usable

floor space that would be lost to a conventional pew or stack chair. The second factor that influences the gain in seat capacity with the use of self-lifting seats is the definition of the individual seat widths. Independent studies show that in continuous bench style seating, people tend to spread out leaving an average of about 5" of lost space between occupants. This alone adds up to a seat loss of 20% in an auditorium that might appear to be full, without even factoring in the loss of floor space from excess aisles.

"This puts to rest any charge that might suggest that one is being extravagant in paying the extra dollars for a theater seat over a pew", Ogden says. "Adding 1% to your overall building cost to increase your seat capacity by 20% with a smart seat choice makes easy sense against the option of building a larger structure to achieve the same increase. Stewardship of space ultimately comes around to how much you value your real estate."

### Personal Space

Ogden points out that although the added seat capacity is probably the greatest single incentive towards a theater seat purchase, the average worship participant will find a more personal benefit to the self lifting seat in another factor: personal space. Few people walking into the worship setting



will give a conscious thought to how many people the place will hold. But everyone will experience the welcome benefit of that extra 8" of passage between rows. When a congregation is standing for worship, the passage area in and out of the rows is limited in a pew or stack chair. The 20" egress in the SERIES products easily accommodates the entry of latecomers as well as those who need to exit the row for reasons ranging from an altar call to a nursery call.

" True innovation is much more than the introduction of something new. It has to fill a need and provide real benefits to the market not being provided by others."

There are additional product options that expand the cause of personal space. Willow Creek had SERIES include lift-up arms on some of the rows to better accommodate larger people or families with children that might prefer more of a continuous seating effect. This is a feature that allows the armrest to pivot backward between the seat backs. Ogden says that Willow's interest in this lift-up arm was part of the inspiration that led SERIES to introduce the church market to

a concept of eliminating the intermediate arm dividers altogether. This option allows 2 more inches of personal space at the hips and elbows which opens the door to the consideration of narrower seats for even more added seat capacity. There are maintenance and cost benefits also associated with the no-arm option.

### Less Maintenance

Addressing the benefits of self-lifting seats is incomplete without recognizing the impact on maintenance issues. Willow Creek's 7,200 seats translate to 12,300 linear ft. of seating. If these were pews or stack chairs, someone would have to walk over 2 miles between services just to pick up the debris that collects on the top of the seats. With self-lifting seats, everything falls to the floor, which has to be swept regardless. The 20" egress makes maneuvering the floor cleaning equipment between the rows much easier and faster.

SERIES' unique construction also provides for easy repair of accidental damage. If a child has an accident on the seat, if there is a grape juice spill, or even vandalism, the seat's zippered covers can be easily removed and replaced with the attic stock covers supplied with the order. With conventional pews, a single stain can spoil an entire 20' pew seat that requires professional repair. "SERIES also introduced what they refer to as special need solutions", says Troeger.





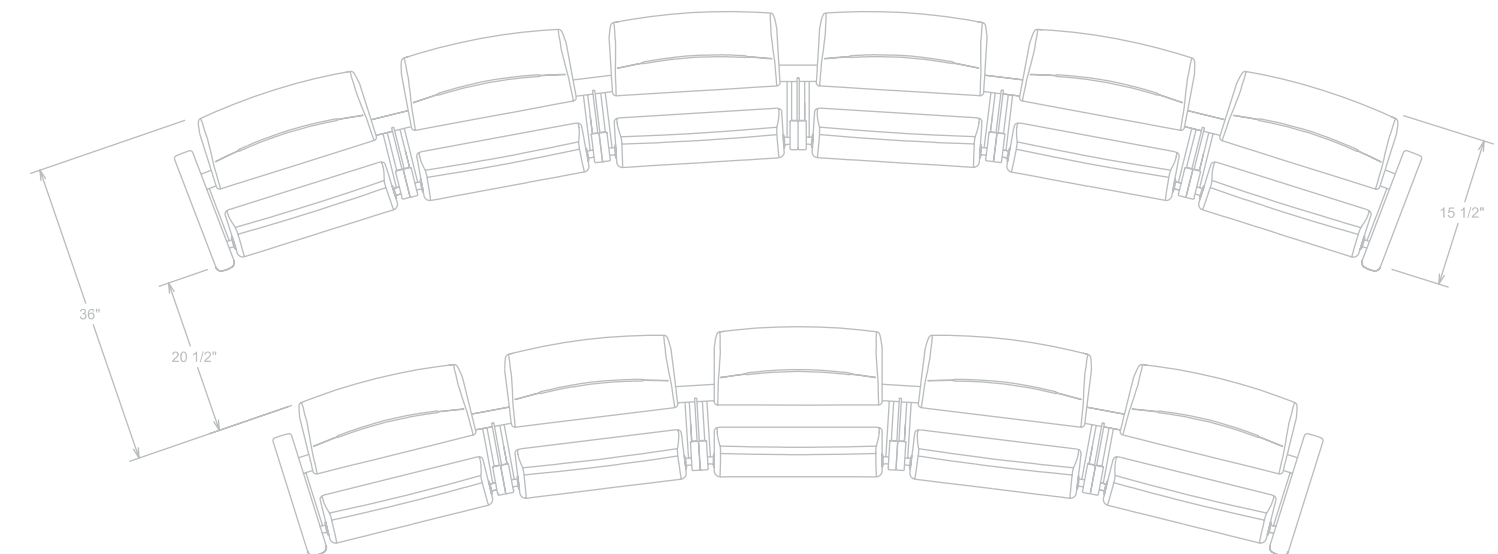




“This included higher backs in the balcony, customized aisle lighting and removable seating in some areas. The state also required us to meet certain ADA (American Disabilities Act) requirements that called for customized seating. SERIES offered unique solutions to these challenges.”

“It was an obvious privilege for SERIES to be in position to serve Willow Creek with their seating requirements”, says Ogden. “We had a high personal interest in Willow, long before we thought of them as a future client.” Willow has had an enormous influence on attracting workers to a worldwide harvest.

“From the beginning, our goal was to create seating that would allow churches the opportunity to make more efficient use of space and time”, says Ogden. “This efficiency factor is just one of many unique product attributes that has contributed to the SERIES value in serving our market.”



### Stewardship Sensitive

Effective innovation is an outgrowth of vision for what is valuable to the market one serves. The ever rising cost of construction suggests that seating with the highest value will be estimated, in part, by design that maximizes use of space and resources; products that deliver more seats per square foot of building, more efficient traffic flow and lower cost of ownership. The 20” egress between rows with the Celebration chair provides three times the traffic flow efficiency of a conventional pew and 20% more seat capacity.

### Real Estate

A conventional pew or stackable chair consumes 3.5 square feet of floor space per seat, compared to only 2.3 square feet with the SERIES product. In a worship setting designed to seat 1000 people, the SERIES product will free up 1,200 sq. ft. of usable floor space that would be lost to a typical pew or stack chair. Ultimately, the value of the SERIES products will be inseparably linked to the value of your real estate.

### Personal Space

Eliminating the intermediate arm divider advances the cause of space efficiency by providing 2 additional inches of individual seat width at the hips and elbows. This allows the use of narrower seat sizes for added seating capacity.



## SERIES USA

Corporate Headquarters

20900 NE 30th Avenue

Suite 901

Miami, FL 33180

P 1 - 800 - 729 - 1190 | + 1 - 305 - 932 - 4626

E [info@seriesseating.com](mailto:info@seriesseating.com)

[SERIESWORSHIPSEATING.COM](http://SERIESWORSHIPSEATING.COM) | [SERIESSEATING.COM](http://SERIESSEATING.COM)

## SERIES Colombia

Carrera 7A Km. 21

Chía, Cundinamarca 250008

Código Postal 250008

P + 57 - 1 - 676 - 0225

E [info@seriesseating.com](mailto:info@seriesseating.com)

[SERIESWORSHIPSEATING.COM](http://SERIESWORSHIPSEATING.COM) | [SERIESSEATING.COM](http://SERIESSEATING.COM)

© 2016 SERIES® Seating

Printed in USA by SERIES® Printing on FSC certified paper

1021131445



C0240256