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Jane Hansen's \$1m gift forms foundation of stronger MTC

MATTHEW WESTWOOD THE AUSTRALIAN FEBRUARY 18, 2016 12:00AM



MTC Foundation chairwoman Jane Hansen and her husband, Paul Little. Picture: Michael Klein

Melbourne Theatre Company has energised its fundraising efforts, with a more efficient development arm and the announcement last night of a \$1 million gift, the biggest to the company from a single donor.

MTC Foundation chairwoman Jane Hansen has given \$1m from the Little Foundation, set up last year with her husband, Melbourne businessman Paul Little.

The couple hosted a party last night at their Toorak home to launch the MTC Foundation.

Hansen, a former investment banker, says the gift is seed funding for an endowment that will be a sustainable underpinning for the company.

The foundation will be seeking to increase the endowment and tailor programs to match donors' interests.

“There’s an awareness that the arts, culture and education all need funding in addition to looking to government,” Hansen says. “We need to work together and inspire other people. It’s a great joy, people are prepared to be engaged.”

The MTC gift is in addition to the \$10m that Hansen and Little donated to the

University of Melbourne last year, principally for history studies

UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE LAST YEAR, PRINCIPALLY FOR HISTORY STUDIES.

The donation follows a restructure of MTC development activities that has increased support for the company and reduced fundraising costs by 70 per cent since 2013.

MTC fundraising has been sluggish compared with some other major arts companies. It raised \$757,698 from donations in 2014, compared with Sydney Theatre Company's \$3m in the same period.

The bar was raised last year to reach \$1.7m, including donations and ongoing support from the Crown Resorts Foundation.

Executive director Virginia Lovett says MTC's development team led by Tiffany Lucas has sharpened its fundraising by reducing donor benefits for smaller gifts and focusing on larger philanthropic giving.

Reduced costs mean a larger share of donations is supporting activities such as touring and education programs.

Similarly, the company has streamlined its relationship with sponsors by tightening sponsor benefits and by seeking support (cash or in-kind) that helps the balance sheet.

The MTC Foundation has been set up to attract philanthropic support for activities such as play readings, new writing commissions, and family and education programs.

Lovett says Hansen's gift will have a profound effect on the company and its artistic ambitions.

"When the tide rises, all the boats lift," she says. "If we can do more (fundraising), more actors will be employed, more creatives will be employed, more companies, more people will be able to gain access to our programs."