

SMITHFIELD, N.C. — The board members of the Ava Gardner Museum may have heard a thousand times that the fans of Ava Gardner are old, dying off, and that soon no one will remember her or visit the museum. That was 18 years ago when the museum embarked on the investment to open its new location on Market Street in Downtown Smithfield. The museum continues to attract thousands of visitors each year and to expand programs, curate new artifacts, and now works closely with the Ava Gardner Trust to protect Ava's image and publicity rights around the world.

With the support of many local corporations, grant funds, the Town of Smithfield, and many volunteers the museum is well designed, and receives high marks from visitors and five-star praise on sites like TripAdvisor. For more than 30 years, the community has supported the Ava Gardner Museum, for which the board is extremely humble and grateful. In that time, the museum has attracted more than 200,000 visitors traveling from around the world to Smithfield and Johnston County, and it has become a cornerstone of activity in Historic Downtown Smithfield. Visitors to the museum spend time exploring the downtown area, stopping by the exhibits at the Heritage Center, walking the Buffalo Creek Greenway, shopping, and enjoying local restaurants.

"Although Ava was heralded as 'the most beautiful woman ever to work in Hollywood', at the museum we have come to understand her legacy on a much deeper level. Her contributions to charity work for cancer research, being an early champion of civil rights, her investment in medical care for veterans, and her dedication to and love for her family is the real Ava – we would love visitors to get to know her like we do. We certainly feel our work to keep the museum open and thriving is vital to Smithfield's Downtown economy," stated Donna Bailey-Taylor, President of the Johnston County Visitors Bureau.

In 2000, the museum board opened the new museum on Market Street, with professionally designed exhibits, and in May 2018 a new exhibit will feature Ava's breakout role in "The Killers" starring newcomer Burt Lancaster. Over the years, the museum has retired the debt on the building, replaced all HVAC units, curated many new artifacts, and invested in museum quality casework. The museum now faces huge structural challenges in the 100-year-old building it occupies. The east facing exterior wall was porous allowing moisture into the museum, and after years of repair to the roof it exceeded its capacity, and both had to be replaced. The museum also needs additional storage space and has identified the back area of the museum to be converted into a climate control area with fire suppression for the collection.

Through secured grants and pending gifts, the museum has raised 60% of the funds needed to complete this work. The museum is kicking off a Capital Campaign for museum building improvements to raise the additional funds needed.

"The museum's remaining goal is \$65,000 and with continued support from the community, we plan on being here another 30 years, protecting Ava's legacy, and sharing her incredible story to new generations that have discovered vintage film and love the Golden Age of Hollywood stars and fashion," stated Lynell Seabold, Museum Director.

The Ava Gardner Museum is a charitable 501 c 3 organization and donations are tax deductible. To receive additional information, visit the museum website, www.avagardner.org or call the museum at 919-934-5830. The museum is located at 325 E. Market Street, Smithfield, NC and is open seven days a week, Monday-Saturday, 9am-5pm, and Sunday, 2pm-5pm.

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<https://media.visitnc.com/Ava-Gardner-Museum-Is-Still-Standing-and-They-Said-It-Wouldnt-Last>