

Annual Judy Garland Festival approaches with Larger Capital Campaign – Purchase Shoes

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Bring the shoes home. This is the capital campaign goal for the Judy Garland Museum in Grand Rapids, Minn. This year's annual Judy Garland Festival will be held June 20-23rd, with an exciting new display centered on what is now known as the "stolen ruby slippers." With the display comes background on the infamous theft from the museum in 2005, leading to one federal felony conviction in January 2024, an additional arrest, a still open FBI case, and intrigue surrounding a mysterious heist that captured international news.

The stolen ruby slippers were recovered by the FBI in 2018. If the magical shoes could talk, they may tell the tale of their travels from nesting in a camper trailer, to being buried underground, to landing in the hands of a well-known Twin Cities criminal defense, rounded up by the FBI, and eventually returned to their rightful owner, Michael Shaw of California. This pair of ruby slippers have a story like no other – known around the nation since 1939 when they debuted and landed on the feet of Judy Garland in the American classic film: *The Wizard of Oz*.

Garland's character Dorothy, after a technicolor visit to the imaginary world of Oz, clicked the heels of those dazzling red shoes together and repeated, "There's No Place Like Home," desiring a return to her home in Kansas. Judy Garland, like the character Dorothy, was born in a rural area in the Midwest – Grand Rapids, a small-town birthplace she declared held happy memories as she took to the stage of her parents' downtown vaudeville theatre.

The ruby slippers will be on another adventure over the next several months as Heritage Auctions showcases them around the world prior to their December auction to the public. The State of Minnesota, The City of Grand Rapids, and the Judy Garland Museum are interested in seeing these cherished shoes rest in their final destination – Judy Garland's birthplace.

Minnesota's Legacy Finance Bill turned into law on May 17th and with it came approval for a \$100,000 grant to try to bring the stolen ruby slippers back "home." Janie Heitz, executive director with the museum explained that the grant is the seed money to create a larger capital drive, securing the winning bid for the shoes. Heitz believes the purchase would benefit the state and local community economically, pulling in substantial tourism dollars.

Heitz said donor dollars for the auction purchase could come in individually, as a group effort, from area businesses, from art patrons and anyone wanting to be a benefactor to the greater good of Grand Rapids via treasured Hollywood memorabilia. "Funders wanted," Heitz exclaimed, "in true happy ending of a story, let's get these shoes home." If the museum is unable to purchase the slippers, the museum officials are unsure of how the \$100,000 grant would be reallocated. To learn more about how you can support and contribute to the Judy Garland Museum capital drive to purchase the ruby slippers, contact 1-218-327-9276 or visit <https://judygarlandmuseum.com>

