

November/December, 1995

CURTAIN Calls

A publication of Community Players Theater

Community Players Theater • 201 Robinhood Lane • Bloomington, IL 61701

Box Office: 309-663-2121

A Little Bit of History

Did you know that Community Players was first formed in 1923? Or that we own our building? Or that Tony Award winning actress Judith Ivey appeared on stage here in the 1970-71 production of *A THOUSAND CLOWNS*? We thought you didn't, so to remedy that fact in each newsletter we will try to feature a little bit of our history. Sometimes we will focus on the plays, other times on past performers or perhaps on the building itself. If there is a particular aspect of the history of Community Players that you are interested in please leave a note for either Bruce Parrish or Jane Thomley with our box office staff. We will try to answer your questions in the next newsletter.

Since we are in the process of major renovations in our lobby, restrooms and planning for replacing the roof over our heads we thought it would be pertinent to feature the building itself this month. Remember, we said we own our building! Prior to the construction of our present building Community Players productions were rehearsed and performed in a variety of locations. Early in our history (1923) members even performed outdoors at a series of garden events held at places like the Ashael Gridley home ("The Oaks") at 301 E. Grove St. in Bloomington. Rehearsals were held at Major's Hall, performances at places like the Consistory or Bloomington High School, but more about this in later issues. The current building was constructed in 1961. A benefit performance of *SHOWBOAT* was performed at the Consistory to raise construction funds of the new building. The original structure included what is now the auditorium and the stage. The stage was portable and could be used to stage plays in the round. The lobby area, Dick Brown

room and the restrooms soon followed. After the permanent stage was installed sets were frequently constructed all the way to the back wall of the stage so that actors exiting had to go outside to make an entrance on the other side. The gas station across Towanda Ave. was gracious enough to let the actors change costumes there and use their restroom facilities when necessary.

The scene shop addition and basement dressing rooms and storage areas were added as a separate addition in the early 1970's. This allowed actors a space of their own, appropriate restrooms and backstage space for more extensive productions. Original plans for the addition would have expanded the auditorium and put the stage where the present scene shop is but building codes at the time required a fire door between the two spaces and limited the amount of open doorway space that connected the two areas. The plans were changed to conform to the appropriate codes and we gained the present scene shop. This may have been a blessing in disguise since it allows us to use the space in a variety of ways and keeps the construction dust in the auditorium to a minimum.

The stage configuration was changed in the spring of 1979 to allow more room for large musicals. Audience members attending the production of *GODSPELL* that spring may remember the proscenium wall being torn down to allow the show to be performed with audience members seated on stage and a large ramp dividing the auditorium into two sections. Following that production the new proscenium wall was installed.



A Little Bit of History (Continued)

Until the spring of 1992 our building had been without air conditioning. Through the years our audiences and actors suffered as we became more conditioned to expect interior climate control, plays ran a greater number of performances and as a result our production season was extended from September through May. Thanks to the efforts of the Board of Governors and the Board of Trustees we have enjoyed a comfortable environment year round since 1992 and as a result have been able to expand our offerings to include a summer production.

We all one of the few community theaters in the United State lucky enough to own our own facility. With that honor comes a tremendous amount of responsibility. In addition to production costs we are responsible for utilities, insurance, upkeep and improvements as well as the many unexpected costs involved in owning piece of property. Bloomington - Normal should take pride in what was once called "the little jewel on Robinhood Lane". Those of us who volunteer at the theater are proud. We hope you are too.

Dates To Remember

THE DIARY OF ANNE FRANK
November 10 - 12, 16 - 18

Auditions for BLEACHER BUMS
January 2, 3

Box office opens for BLEACHER BUMS
February 13

BLEACHER BUMS
February 16 - 18, 22 - 24

Bleacher Bums Auditions Posted

Auditions for the comedy BLEACHER BUMS will be held at the theater on Jan. 2 and 3 beginning at 7:00. This contemporary comedy centers around a group of die-hard Chicago Cubs fans and their experiences at Wrigley Field. Those auditioning will be asked to read from the script.

Area Students To Attend The Theatre

Through the efforts of our Theater for Young People Bloomington - Normal students will be attending two school time performances of DIARY OF ANNE FRANK.

The Board of Governors would like to take this opportunity to thank the cast and crew for donating their time to provide this theater experience for the students in the community. Tickets for the school performances on Friday, Nov. 17 were sold out within 24 hours after they were made available. Student groups who were unable to reserve tickets for the day time performances may purchase tickets at a group discount by contacting our box office. Future plans of other school time performances include three performances of our March production of WINNIE THE POOH. Information for WINNIE THE POOH can be obtained by leaving your name and address with our box office staff.



Curtain Calls is funded by a grant from the McLean County Arts Center. For more information, contact:

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