



# COMMUNITY PLAYERS

## CURTAIN CALLS

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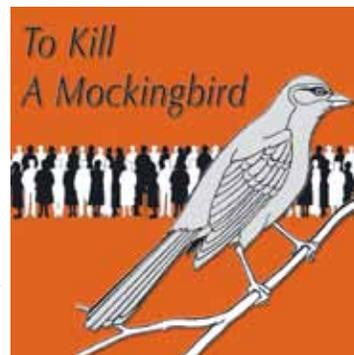
## Mockingbird Lands on Players' Stage

by John Lieder

Harper Lee wrote her novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* in 1960. The play, adapted from the novel by Christopher Sergel in 1990, is performed every May in Monroeville, Alabama, Harper Lee's hometown. Townspeople make up the cast. The novel is a top choice for community reading programs. *To Kill a Mockingbird* is a story that has made a difference in communities across the nation. How fitting, then, that this play be included in the 90<sup>th</sup> season of a theatre group that has the word "Community" in its name.

The cast of our production is, of course, also made up of townspeople. Some of them are Community Players regulars; many of them are making their Players' debuts. Leading the cast is veteran **John Bowen**, portraying Atticus Finch, the character which, according to the American Film Institute, is the greatest hero in American films. Bowen is certainly up to the challenge and portrays Atticus with warmth and confidence. His children, Scout and Jem, are played by **Maggie McHale** and **Haani Ansari**, respectively. Scout and Jem are joined by friend Dill

Harris, played by **John Paul (Woody) McHale**. Playing their neighbors are **Wendi Fleming** as Miss Maudie, **Chrissie Strong** as Miss Stephanie and **Fania Bourn** as Calpurnia. **Dave Lemmon** plays the main antagonist Bob Ewell and **Hannah Kerns** plays his daughter, Mayella. **Ryan Rembert** plays Atticus' client, the wrongfully accused Tom Robinson.



**Jennifer Rusk** portrays Sister Sykes and puts her energy and those fantastic pipes of hers to great use. She is backed up by a black choir who, under the musical direction of **Sally Hoffmann Gowdy**, provides soulful music during the transitions between scenes. I count a total of 39 cast members, which makes this cast larger than most musicals, so space does not permit me to list them all. I would be remiss, however, in not reporting that **Bruce Parrish** is back as the enigmatic Boo Radley!

Family connections are not rare at Community Players, but this production has more than the usual share of them including Maggie McHale and her younger brother, Woody, **Jim Kalmbach** and his son **Michael**, Wendi Fleming and her son **Austin Travis**, **Herb Reichelt** and his son **Eric**, **James Martin** and his son **Andrew**, **Christie Vellella** and her husband **Paul**, Dorothy Mundy and her son **Eli**, and of course we have



Scout (Maggie McHale) talks to Walter Cunningham (Jeremy Stiller) and the old Sarum Bunch while Atticus (John Bowen) and Dill (Woody McHale) look on.

... continued on page 4.

March - April 2013

**Board Meetings**

March 12, 6:00 p.m.  
April 9, 6:00 p.m.  
Community Players Theatre

**To Kill A Mockingbird**

Preview: March 14  
Shows: March 15-17, 21-24

**Broadway in Bloomington**

Shows: April 4-7, 2013

**25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee**

Auditions: March 17-19  
Preview: May 9  
Shows: May 10-12, 16-19 and 23-26



**Community Players**

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**Newsletter Committee**

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Sally Pary

We are always looking for writers, artists, designers and story ideas. Send comments and suggestions to kalmbach@ilstu.edu

*Curtain Calls* is published six times a year for the voting members of Community Players.

For information about joining us, please contact our membership chair, Wendi Fleming at cplayersmember@aol.com.

Back issues of *Curtain Calls* are available on the Community Players web site. Click on "Newsletter Archive."

## 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee Auditions

The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee is a hilarious tale of six adolescent outsiders vying for the spelling championship of a lifetime. The show's Tony Award winning creative team, composer and lyricist William Finn, with book by Rachael Sheinkin, has created the unlikeliest of hit musicals about the unlikeliest of heroes: a quirky yet charming cast of outsiders for whom a spelling bee is the one place where they can stand out and fit in at the same time.



Auditions are Sunday March 17th, Monday March 18th, and Tuesday March 19th at 7:00 pm. Performances run May 10-12, 16-19, and 23-26 with a pay-what-you-can preview on May 9th.

Director **Brett Cottone** will be looking for 5 men and 4 women, 18 and older to fill the following roles:

**CHIP TOLENTINO** - A boy scout and champion of the Twenty-Fourth Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee, he returns to defend his title, but he finds puberty hitting at an inopportune moment. **C3 - B4 Tenor**

**DOUGLAS PANCH** - The Vice Principal. After five years' absence from the Bee, Panch returns as judge. There was an "incident" at the Twentieth Annual Bee, but he claims to be in "a better place" now, thanks to a high-fiber diet and Jungian analysis. (non-singing)

**LEAF CONEYBEAR** - The second runner-up in his district, Leaf gets into the competition on a lark: the winner and first runner-up had to go to the winner's Bat Mitzvah. Leaf comes from a large family of former hippies and makes his own clothes. He spells words while in a trance. **A2 - G4 Baritone or Tenor**

**LOGAINNE SCHWARTZANDGRUBENIERRE (SCHWARTZY)** - Logainne is the youngest and most politically-aware speller with two overbearing homosexual fathers. She is a neat freak, speaks with a lisp, and will be back next year. **C4 - D5 Soprano**

**MARCY PARK** - A recent transfer from Virginia, Marcy placed ninth in last year's nationals. She speaks six languages, is a member of all-American hockey, a championship rugby player, plays Chopin and Mozart on multiple instruments, sleeps only three hours a night, hides in the bathroom cabinet, and is getting

very tired of always winning. **B3 - E5 Soprano/Mezzo-Soprano**

**MITCH MAHONEY** - The Official Comfort Counselor. An ex-convict, Mitch is performing his community service with the bee, and hands out juice boxes to losing students. **E3 - A4 (B4) Tenor**

**OLIVE OSTROVSKY** - A young newcomer to competitive spelling, her mother is in an ashram in India, and her father is working late, as usual but is trying to come sometime during the bee. She made friends with her dictionary at a very young age. **B3 - F#5 Soprano**

**RONA LISA PERETTI** - The number-one realtor in Putnam County, a former Putnam County Spelling Bee Champion, and returning moderator. She is a sweet woman who loves children, but she can be very stern when it comes to dealing with Vice Principal Panch, who has feelings for her that she most likely does not return. **C#4 - Ab5 Soprano**

**WILLIAM BARFEE** - A Putnam County Spelling Bee finalist last year, he was eliminated because of an allergic reaction to peanuts. His famous "Magic Foot" method of spelling has boosted him to spelling glory, even though he only has one working nostril. He has an often-mispronounced last name: it is Bar-FAY, not BARF-ee ("there's an accent aigu," he explains with some hostility). He develops a crush on Olive. **Eb3 - Bb4 Tenor**

The production team asks that you please prepare 16 - 32 bars of music to be played by piano accompaniment. No pre-recorded accompaniment allowed. Please dress appropriately for a dance audition. You will also be asked to read selected passages from the script. If you have any questions about the auditions please e-mail brett.cottone@gmail.com

# 90 Years of Theatre

## The History of Community Players, Part 5

by Dr. Wilson Baltz, Tony Holloway, and Bruce Parrish

As part of the celebration of Community Players' 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Season, the Newsletter will offer the history of the organization. Part 1 covered the founding and the first decade. Part 2 looked at the second decade, 1934-1944. Part 3 surveyed 1945 to 1958. Part 4 covered the building of the Robinhood Lane theater and moved on to 1968. Part 5 takes us up to the winter of 1977.



*Stop the World, I Want to Get Off* Community Plays, 1970.

The 1968-1969 season featured the Neil Simon hit *The Odd Couple*, the Pulitzer Prize-winning musical *How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying*, Edward Albee's drama *A Delicate Balance*, and *Two for the Seesaw*. All four shows received rave reviews in the *Pantagraph*, with particular praise for the quality of the set designs. Among the veterans and newcomers who worked on these shows were Jack Ingold, Don Freese, Wilson Baltz, Carolyn Beyer, John Kirk, Jobie Tick, and Shari Eubanks. The second show of the 1969-1970 season, *You Know I Can't Hear You When the Water's Running*, was criticized as risqué owing to the subject matter and partial nudity (an actor appeared in his underwear). (The play was revived in 2012 with no such complaints.) In summer 1970 Players offered a class on developing acting skills, which concluded with a production of *Spoon River Anthology*.

The 1970-1971 season opener *Any Wednesday* marked Tony Holloway's debut as director. In a move to regain some of the splendor of past opening nights, Players decided to hold a Gala Night for the musical *Stop the World, I Want to Get Off*. Special invitations were sent to the Twin Cities' mayors, past and present board members, trustees, and past presidents. Bill Hoffman, who played the lead, moved on to New York, where he became a successful scenic designer.

The 1971-1972 season was advertised as G-Rated (probably in response to complaints about that actor in his underwear), and included the regional premiere of *Hello, Dolly!* (*Dolly!* was revived in 1987 under the di-

rection of Phil Shaw.) *Wait Until Dark* was notable due to the casting of Penny Hall in this drama about a blind woman tormented by sadistic killers. Penny was legally blind, so the entire set had to be constructed prior to rehearsals so she would have time to memorize her surroundings. This was the last play to be directed by Dick Brown, who passed away shortly afterward. (*Wait Until Dark* was revived in 1997 under

the direction of Carolyn Beyer.)

A reception was held after the opening night of *Butterflies Are Free* in 1974 to honor the late Dick Brown. The green room was named in his honor. This was the first time Players dedicated a space to any one individual in the organization. Ours has the distinction of being the only Brown green room in the country. Players has since named the Box Office in memory of the great Tony Holloway and the stage in honor of Bruce and Kathy Parrish.

The highlight of the 1975-1976 season was the musical *1776*, which ran twelve performances, four more than scheduled. It was directed by Neil Cobb; assistant director Ruth Cobb, also a librarian, brought in reference books to help with each actor's characterization. Newcomers in this production included Scott Meyers, J. D. Scott, and Bruce Parrish. (*1776* was revived in 1998, with direction by Sally Parry.) *Oklahoma!*, in 1977, had a large cast, including such newcomers as Gary Schwartz and John LeMay, who went on to work professionally in films and TV. (*Oklahoma!* was revived in 1989, with L. Jane Thomley directing, and in 2006, with Penny Wilson directing.) In that year of energy conservation, Players responded by reducing the temperature throughout the building to 60 degrees. The cast remembered quite a disagreement between director Tony Holloway and then-trustee president Dan Ghert over thermostat settings in the severe winter of 1977. On several occasions, many of the out-of-town actors were snowbound overnight in Bloomington.

... *To Kill a Mockingbird* preview continued from page 1.  
Rich and Carol Plotkin.

*To Kill a Mockingbird* is directed by **Marcia Weiss** and **Samantha Smith** is producer and assistant director. **Mark Wright** is Lighting Designer and **Rich Plotkin** is Sound Designer. Sally Hoffmann Gowdy is supplying incidental music. **Judy Stroh** is Stage Manager and **Jean Lieder** is House Manager. **Carol Plotkin** is Props Designer with help from **Dorothy Mundy**, who is also serving as Youth Acting Coach. **Opal Virtue** is Costume Designer. The set has been designed by **Kerry Anne Dixon**, while **Anita Corso** is Master Builder.

*To Kill a Mockingbird* deals with the court case of a black man accused of raping a white girl and contains racial epithets and other expressions of racial hatred. For these reasons, the show is not intended for young children. That said, exposure to *To Kill a Mockingbird* is an imperative for people old enough to understand the dramatic and historical context of the play. To enable more young people to see the show, free tickets are being made available for high school students to the three performances of the first weekend (March 15-17) with help from a grant by the McLean County Arts Center and a generous donation from **Chris Terven**.

The pay-what-you-can preview performance is March 14. Regular performances are March 15-17 and 18-21. The March 15<sup>th</sup> performance features a sign language interpreter for the hearing impaired.

### Don Freese Remembrance

by Bruce Parrish

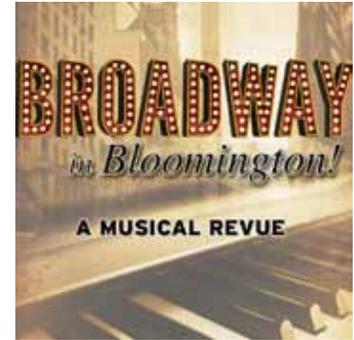
Former Community Players board member, actor and friend Donald (Don) Freese passed away on January 23, 2013. As a teenager Don first appeared in the 1935 Community Players' production of *Big Hearted Herbert*. He returned to Players in 1955 as Alfred in *My Three Angels*. In 1957 Don played the pivotal role of Leonard Vole in Agatha Christie's *Witness for the Prosecution*. After appearing in *The Gazebo* and *The Desk Set*, Don had the role of Biff in *Death of a Salesman*, the first play presented in the current Community Players Theatre building. Don's final appearance on stage was as George Kimball in *Send Me No Flowers* in 1964.

In addition to acting, Don was a member of the Board of Directors (now the Board of Governors) from 1957-1964. Don served as Recording Secretary and as Chairman of the Advertising/Programs Committees. Don was on the board when the current playhouse was built in 1962.

As Players' historian, I had the opportunity to meet Don several times, looking at his scrapbooks, photographs and reminiscing. Don loaned me several photos and newspaper clippings for our collection. He attended shows as his health permitted, as recently *The Solid Gold Cadillac* in 2011.

### Broadway in Bloomington to Celebrate Musicals

*Broadway in Bloomington*, a celebration of the many musicals that Community Players has produced over its 90 years, will be presented one weekend only, April 4-7, 2013. The show will feature performers re-creating songs from shows that they originally performed in, as well as salutes to



the music of Rodgers and Hammerstein, Lerner and Loewe, and Stephen Sondheim, among others. Shows we'll be featuring include *Good News*, the first musical performed by Community Players (1950), *Showboat*, the musical that served as a fundraiser to build our current theater (1961), and *Guys and Dolls*, the first show at Community Players on Robinhood Lane (1964).

Members of the cast are: **Reena Artman**, **Cris Embree**, **Chad Kirvan**, **John Lieder**, **Bob McLaughlin**, **Joe Penrod**, **Chrissie Strong**, **Cathy Sutliff**, **Christie Vellella**, and **Kevin Wickart**, with **Sherise Kirvan** as featured dancer. The narrator is Players historian **Bruce Parrish**.

Each night there will be special guest stars, performers from the past who have moved away or are retired from the stage including **Bob Manasco**, **Kerry Myers**, **Sarah Page**, and **Gary Schwartz**.

The production team is as follows: **Sally Parry**, director; **Chad Kirvan**, musical director; **Sherise Kirvan**, choreographer; **John Lieder**, producer; **Jean Lieder**, assistant producer; **Judy Stroh**, stage manager; **Dorothy Mundy**, props; **Rich Plotkin**, sound; **Dan Virtue**, lights; and **Jean Lieder**, house manager.

### 90th Anniversary Gala

Make your reservations now! Community Players will be holding a Gala to celebrate our 90 years of continuous operation as a community theater on Saturday, June 1, 2013, at the Alumni Center at Illinois State University. Decorations will be in the style of the 1920s to echo our founding in 1923.

Admission to the Gala will include dinner, pre-dinner entertainment, a silent auction, dancing to a dj, and a costume display in the grand hallway. Tickets cost \$32 and may be ordered from the Community Players website.