

A STAR THEATRE IS BORN!

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By Amy Kline

Jennifer Starkey clearly remembers the moment she fell in love with the theatre; that moment came when she was in 7th grade while she was sitting in her school auditorium watching the high school production of “Dracula”.

“How incredible to be able to step on a stage and become another person and that as actors, you get to work as a part in a giant machine that manufactures a product that makes people laugh, cry and think”, she thought.

Twenty four years later, Jennifer is building a “giant machine” right here in Sanford; not only will she work as a part of this machine, but she is inviting the rest of the community to join her.

That “machine” is known as the Star Community Theatre, a summer theatre that will “manufacture” two productions this season, the first to be performed this weekend. “The Auditioners”, a short comedy by Doug Rand, will be performed June 15 at 7 pm and June 16 at 2 pm and 7 pm in the West Lee Middle School cafeteria.

As founder and artistic director, Jennifer is excited to re-introduce community theatre to Sanford. Her idea to begin the Star Community Theatre was inspired by her experience at The Barn Swallow Theatre, a small community theatre located in Michigan where she grew up. “What stood out the most to me were the friendships and the way everyone supported each other and became a family”.

Ron Coley, a drama teacher at Lee County High School and cast member of “The Auditioners”, had a similar experience in community theatre many years ago when he was a performer with The Footlight Players in Sanford. “Community theatre is a place where anyone can learn and grow,” he says. Michelle Morie, board member for the Star Theatre adds, “The great thing about community theatre is that anyone, regardless of their age or what they do for a living has a chance to shine, either on the stage or behind the scenes”.

Although the Star Theatre does not yet have a permanent home, Jennifer is optimistic that as the community learns about the theatre and everything it has to offer, the support for the theatre will grow and a permanent home will be possible. In the meantime, she plans to utilize facilities in the community,

such as West Lee Middle School where the first performance will be held, to hold future productions.

Staying true to her belief that community theatre should focus on the development of individuals and not on profits, Jennifer is determined to build the theatre slowly. “This season we will have one other production in addition to “The Auditioners”; my ultimate goal is to have a three show summer season which includes a play, a children’s production and a musical”, she says.

In addition to seeking support from the community, Jennifer is also hopeful that members of the Sanford community will get involved in the production aspect of the operation. She plans to hold open auditions for each production and those interested in directing can also apply.

Jennifer is already grateful for the support she has received from the community in helping her to launch the Star Theatre. She credits Drew Lucas a local attorney with the Harrington, Gilleland and Winstead law firm in Sanford for helping her to incorporate the theatre and obtain non-profit status. She is also grateful for the cast members who have not only volunteered their time, but who have also shown great commitment to the success of this first project and excitement about the future of the Star Theatre.

Corinthia Lilley, a junior at Southern Lee High School, states, “This is going to open up so many doors for other kids who have always wanted to get involved in theatre but couldn’t afford some of the theatre programs in the area”. Anna Johns, an eighth grader at West Lee Middle School adds, “I hope this will help the community become more aware of the arts; Sanford is very sport-oriented and it will be good for people to see that there is so much more out there”.

Martin Davis, a manager at Lee Iron and Metal, has approached his role in “The Auditioners” with a sense of humility since he has not been on a stage in over twenty years and also with a sense of humor. “I was once paid \$50 to be an extra in a mini-series many years ago, and I’m willing to be paid *not* to act again in the future if anyone is interested”, he says.

More information about the Star Theatre and upcoming performances can be found at www.startheatrenc.org.