

It's all about community



Merely Players Community Theatre performers in costume for "Nunsense - The Musical." Submitted photo.

**Merely Players
Community Theatre
brings people together and
offers them a chance to be
involved on-stage or off.**

Photos and story by Christine Nessler

For 28 years the Merely Players Community Theatre has made the Lincoln Community Center its home. Although it has been a longtime venue in the area, Merely Players seems to be a relatively untapped entertainment source available in Mankato.

Some might wonder what community theatre really has to offer when there is already a wealth of dramatic arts opportunities in Southern Minnesota at places including Minnesota State University, Mankato (MSU), Gustavus Adolphus College and Bethany Lutheran College.

But community theatre is different. It's a part of the performance arts genre that brings a strong sense of belonging to those involved. It's more than just "theatre" for the Merely Players audience, participants and volunteers. It's about passion. It's about taking part in the community. Plus, it gives people another choice.

"Community theatre brings another one of the fine arts to Mankato," says Jon Logging, director of forensics at Bethany Lutheran College and past Merely Players cast member. "It

gives the community options for entertainment, as well as an opportunity to participate."

Logging adds that theatre is a way of looking at life from a different perspective. He enjoys acting with the Merely Players because as he puts it, "Theatre is one of those places where you are encouraged to let go of your insecurities and just have fun."

In comparing it to the collegiate theatre options in Greater Mankato, Logging says colleges and universities are teaching people how to be the best at acting while "community theatre teaches about community and bringing people together to do something they all love."

Merely Players board president Amber Power says the people who are performing in the shows and working behind the scenes are all making time in their busy lives to be active in Merely Players Theatre because it's something they love and are passionate about. They work hard because they want the performances to be the best they can be. They also want the theatre to be successful.

"Anyone with any skills could find something they are interested in and become a part of the team," Logging says.

According to theatre manager Noelle Lawton, theatre people are quirky and Merely Players attracts a wonderfully eclectic group of people from around the area. Lawton, who has been performing since she was seven years old, performed with her mother on the Merely Players stage as a young girl. She says participating in



Merely Players offers another venue for theatre lovers to choose from. Submitted photo.

it's not about pushing the envelope – it's about creating a fun experience for the people involved, and it's a chance to see people in a different outlet.

"It's just fun theatre," says Nancy Zwickey, a season ticket holder.

"It's a place to go to have a good time, and it doesn't cost an arm and a leg." Season tickets are only \$40. Each season consists of three performances. Individual tickets are about \$15. Zwickey has been attending the Merely Players shows for years and also frequents the MSU theatre shows as well as the performances at the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis.

"More people ought to know about it," says season ticket holder Darlene Halverson of Lake Crystal. "It's a wonderful

opportunity for entertainment." She says Merely Players puts on a good variety of shows that are always well done.

Halverson is also a season ticket holder for MSU theatre performances. Although Halverson thinks MSU's offerings are exceptional, she appreciates how community theatre draws from the community, putting friends and neighbors on stage, and gives people a chance to be involved. Halverson, her husband and their two best friends can be found in the front row of every Merely Players show.

According to Power, her hometown of Albert Lea, Minn. is always buzzing about its well-known community theatre. It's her goal to create that same buzz for Merely Players.

They are trying new things, such as revisiting popular children's shows, something that hasn't been done in a number of years. Power says the board is trying to "get the

rust off the wheels and get the Merely Players' wheels in motion." 

Upcoming events

"Nunsense: The Musical"

2 p.m., November 1
7:30 p.m., November 6-7
2 p.m., November 8

"The Wind in the Willows"

Children's Theatre
7:30 p.m., December 3-4
2 p.m. December 5-6

All shows held at Lincoln Community Center, 110 Fulton St., Mankato

For tickets call 507.388.LIVE or purchase tickets at www.twinriversarts.org.

community theatre creates incredible friendships and lifelong bonds. The volunteers put in a tremendous amount of time and work, according to Lawton. It's that kind of dedication that shines through in the performances.

Merely Players perform mainstream theatre and tend to stick with comedy, mystery, musicals and family friendly shows. They found those were the most popular shows. Audiences liked the familiarity of knowing what to expect. According to Lawton

Christmas at Bethany

December 3-6
4 p.m. daily
at Trinity Chapel

Visit www.blc.edu/ChristmasAtBethany for more information and reservations.

