

Patuxent Playhouse has fun with 'Rumors' this weekend and next

The Patuxent Playhouse, Calvert's oldest community theater company, has been delighting local audiences since 1989, and the 2005-2006 season is no exception. This weekend and next, they present their version of Neil Simon's farce, "Rumors," at St. John Vianney Family Life Center in Prince Frederick.

Most of Simon's plays are comedy-dramas, but "Rumors" is pure farce. The play opens in the upscale townhouse living room of Charlie and Myra Block on the evening of their 10th anniversary. Guests Chris and Ken Gorman arrive and are horrified to find Charlie has been shot through the earlobe, Myra is nowhere to be found, and the servants are missing, too. Three more couples arrive and the situation rapidly gets out of hand. By the third act, one couple has fallen apart after a fist-fight, another couple have burned, diced and sliced themselves trying to cook dinner, there are more explosions and shots, and the police arrive to find bodies draped over chairs — although several are merely drunk — dinnerware, glasses and guests' possessions scattered about the stage. None of the guests has an explanation for the police. Somehow the whole piece comes together at the end amid much hilarity for the playgoers.

An excerpt from Simon's memoir, "The Play Goes On," describes how he happened to write "Rumors." "Having just finished a dark examination of my parents' lives, of their broken promises and lost love, I



North County News

Pat Ullberg reports from Prince Frederick north



COURTESY PHOTO

Keri Gray and Wayne Moyer portray Cassie and Glenn in the Patuxent Playhouse production of Neil Simon's "Rumors." The production begins this Saturday at the St. John Vianney Family Life Center in Prince Frederick.

wanted to erase those bitter thoughts from my mind and spend a year enjoying myself. A trip around the world would have been a good solution, but I had a different yearning. I chose to write a farce, not realizing that technically speaking, writing a good farce may be the hardest undertaking in a writer's career."

If writing a good farce is hard, performing it well enough to get the laughs to carry what is basically a nonsensical plot played at top-speed is not a piece of cake for actors, either. The Patuxent Playhouse cast, however, seems more than equal to the challenge. Geri Reynolds, a troupe member, is directing

this production, and also is one of the 10 actors in this play. Reynolds has been with the company for some time. She is a former employee of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Southern Maryland, but now fills her time with her five children, her volunteer work for the Calvert school district, at Mill Creek and Southern Middle Schools, and with the theater company. All of the company have jobs or other occupations, so must fit evening and weekend rehearsals into their own full schedules.

One night a couple of weeks ago, your fearless columnist stopped by St. John Vianney Family Life Center to meet with Geri Reynolds and Ken Garvin,

the president of the Patuxent Playhouse board of directors. Garvin is a playwright himself, and is currently working on a musical entitled "The Project," to be staged by the Playhouse sometime in the spring or summer of 2006. He's written the plot, and all the songs, with a collaborator, Roy Johnson. Geri Reynolds also will direct that production.

Before the musical goes into production, though, they'll present another Simon play next February. Reynolds although very busy, stopped to talk between taking cast photos, and directing the "Rumors" cast for a spot about the play that they were filming for Channel 10. After the television filming, the cast planned to begin the actual rehearsal, which would make for a very late night for the actors. Because the Patuxent Playhouse is a community theater, their mission is to involve as many people of all ages in their productions, and to fulfill this mission, according to their slogan, with "Honesty, ability, integrity and teamwork." Reynolds notes that community theatre is a powerful instrument for bringing the community together.

"Parents who start playing roles bring their kids into the production side, or sometimes into acting," he said. "There's something for everyone in the family."

Garvin added, "The company has been blessed to have the support of St. John Vianney Family Life Center." Without the church's support in allowing the use of the center, the

group would have no place to present their plays. Patuxent Playhouse is organized as a nonprofit, and indeed, like many under-funded community organizations, is truly nonprofit. To paraphrase Tennessee Williams, our community theater groups, "Have to depend on the kindness of others."

The Patuxent Playhouse lives on small grants from Arts Council of Calvert County, the in-kind support from St. John's, the Playhouse members, community members, and occasional donations.

St. John Vianney Catholic Church has been extremely supportive of the Playhouse, although it is not part of the church. George Sullivan, a parishioner of St. John Vianney, and the center facilities manager, says that the collaboration between the church and the Playhouse been a very productive and mutually beneficial relationship. St. John Vianney has a drama ministry for its teen congregation. The church teen theater group is learning a lot from Patuxent Playhouse, about the technology involved in staging a production. Sullivan also noted that the working relationship between the Playhouse and St. John Vianney shows how organizations can work together to strengthen the entire community. This relationship gives the Playhouse a place to rehearse, and a new, very well equipped auditorium in which to perform. Performance venues for small volunteer performing arts groups are in very short supply in Calvert County.

St. John Vianney Catholic Family Life Center is a great community resource. The fully equipped auditorium seats about 250 people. The building was completed and dedicated in 2004. This example of the latest and best in building technology for community use, was donated by the Dolan Foundation. John and Jean Dolan are parishioners of St. John Vianney, and also have donated or pledged similar centers, through their family foundation, at Bishop McNamara High School in Upper Marlboro, and plan to donate another to a church in St. Mary's County. The foundation's mission is to give the parish teens a safe environment and positive activities to fill their afterschool and vacation time.

The Patuxent Playhouse has staged benefits for the Boys & Girls Club of Southern Maryland, and for other worthy nonprofit organizations. To see the Playhouse at their best, catch them at one of this weekend's — or next weekend's — performances at the Family Life Center. Tickets are \$15 at the door, or can be ordered on line, at <http://www.patuxent-playhouse.com>. The show goes on Nov. 4, 5, 11 and 12. St. John Vianney Family Life Center can be contacted at 410-414-9099.

Readers' comments and/or suggestions for topics for future columns are welcome. Letters may be sent to the Recorder; P.O. Box 485, Prince Frederick, MD 20678, e-mail, patullberg@comcast.net.