

Kanata Theatre celebrates 50 years of show business

The volunteer thespian group has seen change over time, but continues to entertain the community

BY REBECCA ATKINSON

It was 1968 when Mary Mauger placed a notice of invitation to all "ham actors" in the Kanata Standard, the weekly paper, which at the time was several pieces of letter-size paper stapled together.

The first meeting consisted of the decision to meet regularly to read plays together.

By the following spring, the group performed an evening of one-act plays at the Stephen Leacock Public School in Beaverbrook.

The Kanata Theatre is now kicking off its 50th season – no small feat for a volunteer-based group that started out as a group of "ham" actors gathering together in the late Mauger's own house.

Mauger was the theatre's first secretary and responsible for directing and costumes for the first play. She is remembered as having worked on many plays, the production of costumes, sets, and showing up at many rehearsals.

She passed away in 2009 after decades of dedication to the Kanata Theatre. The 350-seat mainstage auditorium at the Ron Maslin Playhouse, where the Kanata Theatre performs its plays, is named after Mauger and her work in the community theatre.

The playhouse was constructed in 1996, with the performance of *The Importance of Being Earnest* as its first production. In 2001, the building had an extension built to accommodate more space for the group.

Kanata Theatre President Gordon Walls has been involved with the company in many capacities for the last 20 years of shows,



Rebecca Atkinson photos

Actors from the Kanata Theatre run a dress rehearsal for *Don't Dress for Dinner*, the group's kickoff show for its 50th year. The show opened earlier this week.

from acting to working backstage.

He was performing in Ottawa theatre groups for about a decade before joining the Kanata Theatre, but upon recommendation of a couple different people who came about in his life, Walls decided to audition for the west end theatre.

And he has never looked back.

Being heavily involved in the theatre for over the last two decades, Walls has witnessed firsthand how the environment has shifted drastically.

"It's becoming a more challenging environment for arts in general," he said. "It's not surprising that movie studios had their worst year in 20 years last year. I think



that's an indication of a wider trend."

Walls told *Your Community Voice* that theatre revenues have been dropping all over, not only in Kanata or Ottawa, but across North America.

"The world is a lot different than it was even 10 years ago... From an arts

perspective, there are certainly a lot more competitive voices for people's attention."

Technology has changed the way in which we live our lives, and live theatre has not been immune to those changes.

There are subtle ways in which Walls and others



have seen the theatre evolve over the years. While it may not be totally apparent to an audience, the way things happen behind-the-scenes has significantly changed over the years.

New technology has allowed for more computerization in sound and lighting systems, with fewer manual systems to facilitate.

And while there have been many changes and live theatre has been hit in some ways as a result, Walls is uncertain there's any cause for concern.

"The people who have

been here a long time don't worry about the ups and downs."

The Kanata Theatre puts on five regular season shows and two additional shows each year, with a full lineup anticipated for its half-century year, kicking off the year with a sex farce show by the name of *Don't Dress For Dinner*, opening this week.

Each year, the group sees more talent come through its doors for auditions and continues to grow as a community. Remarkable for its size, is the fact that the Kanata Theatre is entirely volunteer-run.

"If you use that as criteria, we are the largest theatre in the city that is completely volunteer-based," said Walls.

With each and every role filled by volunteers, it gives members the chance to try their hand at different things.

While some prefer the limelight and others prefer the lighting board, the Kanata Theatre allows people to work in their strengths and fosters a learning environment for new opportunities. That said, at the end of the day, the group strives for greatness as far as community theatre goes.

"Auditioning is a competition," said Walls.

"We need the best people in the right spots at the right moment, to make the best plays possible. In the end, it's all about having fun and being creative."

The Kanata Theatre will be housing a total of seven shows this coming year, kicking off this week. For tickets and more information on the Kanata Theatre, please visit www.kanatatheatre.com

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