

# Vernonia Community Theater Profiles: Part 3 Getting Involved in Community Theater

The Vernonia Community Theater (VCT) was formed in 2010 with the intention of bringing the performing arts to Vernonia. The VCT and their productions involve both youth and adults and provide a creative outlet for members of the Vernonia community to express their artistic talents. In this series of profiles over several months leading up to the VCT's third production this April, Vernonia's Voice will visit with key members who make up the VCT.

The Vernonia Community Theater has announced their newest production, *Vaudeville's My Home*, which is scheduled to hit the stage in the Washington Grade School Auditorium on April 13 and 14 at 7:00 PM.

The play, written by Ken Bradbury, is a semi-musical comedy set in the 1920s. It starts out with two vaudeville troupers who are fleeing New York following their robbery of a theater box office. They become stranded in a rural village that needs a new school (does this sound familiar?). Broke and hungry, the men devise a plan to swindle the local populace by convincing them they have enough talent to produce their own vaudeville show to raise money for that new school.

This event will probably be one of the last public activities to take place at the historic Washington Grade School, which is scheduled to be de-constructed after this school year.

The VCT draws a varied and interesting mix of actors and actresses to participate in its productions and has uncovered some real local talent. In one of their previous efforts, *Robin Hood*, the VCT used a cast made up entirely of children. Their holiday play, *Expose', Holiday Celebrities Tell All* was filled with hilarious skits and great costumes. Many of the roles in their current production are filled by community members with very little or no previous acting experience. A few have some very real theater background and training.

This production of *Vaudeville's My Home* will stretch the talents of the VCT even further. As a musical there is a need to find actors with even more skills and experience.

And of course, the VCT isn't just made up of actors—it's takes a whole village to put on a play. There is a need for all kinds of behind the scenes help—from set design and construction

to costume creation, lighting and sound and of course, direction.

*Vernonia's Voice* stopped by to view an early practice session, and chat a bit with some of the actors and actresses who will be taking the stage in April for the VCT and find out who is getting involved in local community theater in Vernonia.

**Jill Hult**— This is Jill's first time working with VCT. "This is the first chance that I had time to get involved," says Jill. Jill has a strong supporting role in the upcoming production and will play Eloise Findley, an older woman who has a key role in the story.

In the past Jill performed in a musical, "Anything Goes," when she was a freshman here at Vernonia High School. In college in Mississippi she had a lead role in "Play It Again, Sam." She also has taken some college classes that involved some acting practice, but has no previous community theater experience.

"That's why I think I jumped at this opportunity," says Jill. "I've always enjoyed the things I've been in and enjoyed playing around with acting in classes. So to finally have the time to do it again is nice. I really want to see this be successful and see more people get involved."

Jill says she thinks this is a great play. "It's hilarious and very fitting for our town and the time and things we are going through right now," says Jill. "It's funny with a lot of slapstick comedy."

**Mackenzie Brown**—Mac is a recent graduate of Vernonia High School and is studying Music at Longview Community College. He played Cupid in the VCT's 2010 production of *Expose', Holiday Celebrities Tell All*. "I tried out for a much smaller role, but they convinced me to take a bigger part," says Mac about his last experience with VCT.

The same thing happened again this time—because of a busy school schedule, Mac was looking for a small part, but ended up with one of the two lead roles and will play Clyde Fish, one of the con men in the story.

**Diana Peach**—Diana was a theater major as an undergraduate at Millbury College in Vermont. She has performed Shakespeare and sang in the chorus of several musicals ("I don't have a great

voice," she says). After college she did some work in local community theater, but then decided to start a family. "Family and rehearsal don't go real well together, so I haven't done any theater since." It's been about thirty years since



Diana was on stage in a theater production.

Diana will play Mrs. Gagliano in this VCT production. "I think I was the only one who could do an Italian accent," she laughs. Diana says it's not a big part but it is really fun. Her role calls for her to play a "loudmouthed, obnoxious, country woman" which I thought might be a bit of a trick for diminutive and usually soft spoken Diana. "No, I can be very loud," she says, "and I get to do a lot of sight gags. I'm practicing my Italian accent around home," she adds.

Diana likes the script the group is working with and likes the minor changes that have been made to make the story more Vernonia oriented. "There are some things that are not supposed to be funny in the script, but when they are changed to be Vernonia references, they become pretty funny," says Diana.

**Brianna Gardner**—Brianna is an eighth grade student at Vernonia Middle School and is thirteen years old. For this VCT production she will play twenty-two year old Imogene McDowell, who falls in love with one of the two con men, Clyde Fish.

Brianna says previously she had a role and singing part in a sixth grade musical and this will be her first experience working in community theater. She will sing a duet in this VCT produc-

tion along with a musical number with her acting family.

"I think it will be fun and funny," says Brianna about *Vaudeville's My Home*, although she says her part is "kind of serious."

**John Wacker**—John is new to the Vernonia community, having just moved here this past August. John retired in 2008 and spent three years traveling around the country before returning to his home state of Oregon and landing in Vernonia.

"I read about the auditions and this is something I've always wanted to try, so here I am," says John about landing a lead role in this VCT production. "It was on my bucket list—not real high, but now I'll be glad to get it off."

John says he no previous theater experience. "Not even in grade school!" says John. "I never would have stuck my hand up and volunteered to be in a play," says John. John was a school teacher, so he is comfortable in front of an audience, even a hostile one.

John, who has one of the lead roles, has one big hurdle to overcome for this musical—he says he doesn't sing. "My first wife kicked me out of the church choir she was directing," he says with a laugh. "They needed people and I said I would help out—I lasted three weeks and then she told me they didn't want me!" The VCT group has committed to teaching John to sing for his role.

"I'm looking forward to it," says John about acting in VCT. "This is what I wanted to come to Vernonia for—to get involved in the community a little bit."

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