

KLIFE

Keizer Homegrown kicks off Women's History Month with *Steel Magnolias*

BY CHARLES GLENN
Of the Keizertimes

Two years ago, Keizer Homegrown Theater (CKHT) was all set to proudly put on the play *Steel Magnolias*, by Robert Harling. The six-person, all-women cast had prepared for weeks, memorized their lines, decided on costumes, set performance times – and then COVID crashed the party. This Friday, they finally get to “break a leg,” – and coincidentally, they’re also kicking off Women’s History Month.

“We had already rehearsed for two weeks,” said Jennifer Johnson, the play’s director and member of the KHT board. “Four of our six actors are returning from two years ago. So it’s been a long process.”

“It was, you know, we’ll go up in four months, then it was six months,” explained an exasperated Johnson. “We’ve just been pushing it out and pushing it out. So it’s been great that we’ve hit it at exactly the right time.”

Despite the delays, and having to

replace two of the previous actors, Johnson says the cast is ready to go and excited about the play.

Most people know the film of the same name starring Sally Fields, Julia Roberts and Dolly Parton. The play, which is very similar to the film version, takes place on a single set and is based on a true story. Harling wrote the original play in the early 1980s about the death of his sister and the women he grew up around in northwest Louisiana.

The play has been immensely popular since it debuted and has appeared in community theaters across the country, and even in far-flung venues such as Poland and Estonia. It was performed on Broadway in 2005 and starred Delta Burke and Rebecca Gayheart.

“What I love about this show is that the actors are all very different women,” said Johnson. “The characters are all different and they are strong in their own ways. So I love



Theresa Burke, left as "Annelle" and Danna Swanenberg prepare for their Friday opening performance at the Keizer Homegrown Theater.

Photo by CHARLES GLENN

that it’s not just ‘women are fabulous and men are stupid,’ it’s not that kind of show at all. I appreciate that it’s building bridges as well as showing the strength of women.”

Danna Swanenberg is one of the cast members from the original

production. She plays the role of Truvy, who she describes as a “spirited woman.”

“I will say that it was one of those roles that I had specified that I was interested in,” said Swanenberg. “The idea is that these women are tender as magnolias and as hard as steel.”

Swanenberg joins Theresa Burke as Annelle, Wendy Braun as Ouiser, Cynthia Hicks as M’Lynn, Amanda Konstantin as Shelby, and Shelley Stoye as Clairee.

“This is our 10 year anniversary,” said Johnson. “We’ve also been hosting other groups in the theater. We have an acting class that goes on here four times per week, we have a comedy club that comes about twice a month. We’re also doing *The Music Man* later this year at the high school.”

Steel Magnolias runs from Mar. 11-27 at the Keizer Cultural Center. Tickets can be purchased online or at the door for \$15 (free with the Oregon Trail card, limit one per transaction).

Showtimes are 7 p.m. each Friday and Saturday in March, and each Sunday at 2 p.m.



Cynthia Hicks, left, as "M'Lynn," Amanda Konstantin, middle, as "Shelby," and Danna Swanenberg, right, as "Truvy"

Photo by CHARLES GLENN