

'It's a Wonderful Life'

THE COASTER THEATRE IN CANNON BEACH TRANSFORMS INTO BEDFORD FALLS THIS FESTIVE HOLIDAY SEASON

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Submitted photos by GEORGE VETTER / CANNON-BEACH.NET



It's a holiday weekend in Cannon Beach. Lights, shop windows, meanderers, a marquee, the box office, then the theater doors and a crowd inside. Guffman's here. It's a sold out show. It's a wonderful life.

Bob Cratchit and Ebenezer Scrooge, though, are elsewhere at Christmas Eve this season. The Coaster Theater has become Bedford Falls.

"We've toyed with bringing 'It's a Wonderful Life' to the Coaster for many years," says Jenni Tronier, the Coaster Theatre's marketing and operations director. "Our review committee decided this year to present an alternative to the Coaster's traditional holiday Dickens play."

"A Christmas Carol" will return to the Coaster in 2017. In the meantime, important similarities unite the two popular holiday plays: An angel leads troubled men from the precipice of death, through the consequences of their lives, from revelation to epiphany, just in time for them, with rekindled joyfulness, to save themselves and others.

Of course, similarities between Ebenezer Scrooge and George Bailey just about end there. George Bailey, a restless, adventurous spirit who suddenly inherits the weighty responsibilities of his family's business, Bailey Bros. Building and Loan, settles into the long slog of small town life. The town quietly and happily prospers. But George Bailey's scroogey business rival, Mr. Potter — who could use a visit by an angel himself — lucks into an opportunity to ruin Bailey and the Building and Loan. When the play opens, despairing at the futility of his unremarkable life, George Bailey is about to leap from a bridge. Maybe his life insurance will save the family bank. Maybe it would have been better if he'd never been born.

The original film, 70 years old this season, is an elaborate adaptation of a brief, unpublished holiday story written a few years earlier by Philip Van Doren Stern, an accomplished Civil War historian, editor and novelist who was inspired by Dickens' tale. He printed 200 copies of his own story, "The Greatest Gift," and sent them as Christmas cards.

Hollywood, though, found the story. There it suffered several failed attempts to turn it into a suitable screenplay until director Frank Capra and his Liberty Films production writers salvaged it and created "It's a Wonderful Life" starring Jimmy Stewart in 1946.



George Bailey, played by Ben Ruderman, right, uses his honeymoon savings to lend financial support to townsfolk at the Building and Loan during a run on the bank.



George Bailey, played by Ben Ruderman, right, finds love with Mary Hatch, played by Emily Dante in "It's a Wonderful Life."

Continued on Pg. 11