

Shippin' it

Peninsula Players build sailing ship set for 'HMS Pinafore' production

By **PATRICK WEBB**
FOR COAST WEEKEND

None was present to record the conversation, but it was presumed to go like this:

Rita Smith: "We have chosen 'HMS Pinafore' for our next show. I want you to build a sailing ship on our stage."

Andy Tauber: "OK."

A month or two later, Smith and Tauber are busy rehearsing the cast for the Peninsula Players' next theatrical production.

And the stage of the River City Playhouse in Ilwaco, Wash., has been transformed into a 19th-century British sailing vessel, complete with ship's wheel, antique bell and a sturdy-looking bowsprit.

Tauber is the stage manager and set and lighting designer. He retired to the Long Beach Peninsula a few years ago after a behind-the-scenes show business career in California.

Smith is the guiding light for the Players, directing and regularly appearing in the troupe's shows.

The curtain won't go up on their version of the Gilbert and Sullivan light opera until Friday, March 29. But getting a set built early is critical to determining blocking — the theater word for where the actors stand to deliver their lines.

"The whole play is set on the deck of a ship that is tied up to the dock," said Smith. "It's great! It is different from what started out."

Tauber commended his crew of four who pitched in. Steve Kovach and three actors from the show, Natasha Beals, Patrick Buckley and Bette Lu Krause, worked three full days, including modifications.

"We changed the design after it was originally built," he said. "Some things didn't work in the way we were doing the blocking. Then we decided to make the whole stage the ship."

Tauber said the only difference between this project and his professional career is budget. "The challenge is finding the materials to make it work."




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Robert Scherrer, who plays the captain, tests the knots holding together the ratlines during a break from rehearsals. The bowsprit pokes out into the audience to give an impression of the scale of the ship.

In community theater, set pieces are inevitably reused. Tauber directed "Black Comedy" for the troupe in November, and built a colorful apartment set with an upstairs bedroom. Some larger wooden portions have been converted into deck levels; other pieces were gleaned from his recent house remodel.

"I like the bow," he said, pointing to authentic-looking rigging with the Union Jack unfurled aloft. "We have 'ratlines' — someone climbs on them during the show." Internet research helped identify sailor's knots. "You can tighten the rope, but it's not rigged like a real ship."

Touches of authenticity are evident, however. The troupe borrowed a heavy cannon from Tucker Wachsmuth of Oysterville, Wash., that came from an Ilwaco shipwreck.

The show will run Friday, March 29, to Sunday, April 14. Details will be announced. 



Submitted photo
Tucker Wachsmuth, of Oysterville, Wash., delivers a heavy cannon to the theater in Ilwaco for the Peninsula Players' production of 'HMS Pinafore.'



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Stage manager Andy Tauber at the wheel of 'HMS Pinafore,' which will set sail for audiences in Ilwaco, Wash., March 29. He and a crew of four built the sailing ship set for the Peninsula Players' production over the course of three busy days.