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“This hotel was not normal. This was a real magical place,” said Herron, who grew up across the street from the building, which was known as one of the largest coastal destinations from Seattle to San Francisco.

“I said, ‘somebody’s got to capture this because people will forget what kind of a world it really was.’”

#### Bringing the hotel to life

The play will mold melody and memory from Herron’s childhood on stage as a team of 10 actors and eight musicians recreate the Gearhart Hotel, which was torn down in 1972, just months before it would have earned a protected spot on the national historic registry.

Herron spent his summers swimming at the hotel’s pool and his falls feasting in the grand dining halls. Every New Years Eve, the Osburns, who owned the hotel, hosted a party, and Ms. Osburn rode her palomino horse through the lobby at midnight.

“My family would tell me stories about when they were younger and I didn’t really believe them,” said Crystal Rouse, 16, an actor in the musical. “But to hear it from [Herron] is just so cool.”

“It feels like I missed out, because we don’t have that these days.”

Rouse gets to relive it all as Sally Shea, a Gearhart Hotel lifeguard and heroine in the musical.

Like every character in the play, Shea was an actual member of the Gearhart community.

“We’re using all original names,” Herron said. “Every name that you hear in the play is actually a person.”

The play, which is set in 1959 but designed to encompass any era, is comprised of fictional scenes strongly rooted in Herron’s childhood. It’s a musical of



Lucy Kleiner/The Astorian

**From left: Don and Wanda Warren of Portland play Chefs Mark and Marie. Holly Snook of Clatsop County plays Julie, and Aaron Ford of North Carolina plays Sandy McCall.**



Lucy Kleiner/The Astorian

**Playwright, composer, co-producer and pianist Mike Herron will be on stage as George Arnold at the Piano Bar. Herron grew up across the street from the Gearhart Hotel.**

conflict, tragedy, youthfulness and love.

#### Community-supported play

The hotel brought Herron a lifelong best friend, Blake Osburn; his first heartthrob, Sally Shea, the 18-year-old who taught him to swim

when he was 6; and his wife, Moe, the play’s co-producer, whom he met in the hotel’s bikini room 57 years ago.

While Herron couldn’t realize the impact the hotel had made on him during his adolescence, its history and community is the reason he



Lucy Kleiner/The Astorian

**The musical follows the families, employees and visitors through a summer at the Gearhart Hotel, ‘the magical place by the sea.’**

has returned, and that same community remains the foundation of the musical.

Herron’s friend from first grade, now a master carver, built all the sets. Another grade school friend is hosting him at their home.

“I could really draw from the community and relationships,” Herron said.

The play’s orchestra will even feature two of Herron’s former piano students

— violinist Tracie Andrusko and bass player Richard Sarpola.

He taught Andrusko when she was 6 years old. Now 52, she is the first chair second violinist for the Vancouver (Washington) Symphony.

Sarpola and his son, George, will break from pit orchestras on Broadway in New York City to play in the musical. Herron gave Rich-

ard lessons when he was 4.

Herron himself will play piano for the orchestra.

#### Special check-in

When audience members arrive at the theater, they will be greeted by Janna and Mallory Osburn, the biological grandchildren of the hotel owners, who will hand out paper keys that signify entry to the hotel.

“They’re not just getting a seat,” Harris said. “They’re checking into the hotel — the magical place by the sea.”

Throughout the play, historic photos will be projected on screen to help those in the audience who once visited the hotel remember and to help those who never got the chance to experience it.

“What I have always believed is that a good story transports you to that era,” Harris said. “It helps you see yourself there.”