Students take the stage at Seaside High School

Drama program 'brings people together'

By Katherine Lacaze
For Seaside Signal

Drama — in all forms — will ensue this fall during Seaside High School's production of "Altar Egos," a hilarious spoof about weddings, marriage and family dynamics.

"I think it's very relatable to anyone who's been married or seen people married," said Susan Baertlein, the Seaside teacher directing the fall play for the second year.

She planned to hold auditions in mid-September for "Altar Egos," which was performed once before at the high school about a decade ago under the

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Seaside High School English teacher Susan Baertlein will be directing this year's fall play, "Altar Egos," a hilarious spoof about weddings, marriage and family dynamics.

direction of Lenore Morrisson.

Featuring an ensemble cast of 17 characters — with doubling potential — the comedy is about a young couple who want a simple wedding and

gets it — at least for the first few minutes of the play. Enter parents and siblings of both the city-bred groom and country-born bride, and it takes a circus ringmaster, football referees and even an interpreter to help work out the hilarious situations and communication flops that transpire.

When selecting this year's play, Baertlein took input from the students who are actively involved in the high school's theater program. Among other qualities, they appreciated "Altar Egos" for its ensemble cast, with plenty of interesting roles for numerous students; simple set and costume requirements; and the underlying comedy. Because the script was written in 2000, it contains a few outdated tropes — such as the stereotypical bridezilla and country versus city prejudices

— but those can be interpreted as satire, Baertlein said. At its heart, the play is about liking family members and significant others because of their positive qualities, and loving them in spite of their faults.

At Seaside High School, the fall play tends to include a cast of 10 to 12 students. Junior Frida Ruff, who was in both the play and spring musical during the 2017-18 school year, said it's common to see familiar faces, or "a core group," between the two productions, but the casts also change slightly because of students' participation in other extracurricular activities that run at the same time.

Baertlein would like to eventually create a sixth-through 12th-grade drama program to give performing arts opportunities and theater education to younger students

and prepare them to take on lead roles when in high school.

The benefit of drama, according to Baertlein and Ruff, is the chance for students to take part in a team-like environment that's not sports-related or competitive, but rather creative and entertaining. The students bond over a shared goal and desire for a strong production, Ruff said, adding, "it really just brings everyone together."

While some students participate looking for a fun activity to do, there are others who "live for drama," Baertlein said.

"They love the spotlight and need a good outlet for that," she added.

Ruff is one of those students who is particularly passionate about performing arts. Throughout middle school, she attended several summer and spring theater camps at the

Coaster Theatre Playhouse. Asked what draws her to the stage, she responded, "I feel like I've been doing (theater) for so long, I've forgot why I do it. I just enjoy it."

"I love being onstage," she said, adding she doesn't have a favorite type of role to play but enjoys any one she gets. "It's so nice to adopt that character for a little while and to have everyone doing it with you."

Baertlein especially enjoys watching the transformation between the first stilted cold reading of the script to the end product, when the students are performing in front of a live audience.

"You give them a lot of responsibility and you see them embrace that," she said. "When they get under the lights, in front of an audience, they really shine."