

SPRINGFIELD — The Springfield Players are working toward a goal: To renew and refurbish the building the group has rented from the town for a dollar a year since 1979.

The Players, who claim the distinction of being the longest continually operating amateur theater group in Vermont, are hard at work rehearsing the second production of their current and 97th season, "Greater Tuna" by Jaston Williams, Joe Sears, and Ed Howard.

Behind the scenes there is quite a bit more going on. The organization's new president, John MacDonald, has been hard at work on an ambitious renewal project aimed at refurbishing the building, and increasing the number and variety of events the venue will provide.

"I jumped in and took ownership to really make a difference," said MacDonald, a member of the group on and off for 20 years.

His goal is to improve the building's accessibility, provide more comfort for the patrons, and freshen up and improve the visual effects. MacDonald says the building that is now their theater was built as an elementary school in the 1930s during a major expansion of

population. The Players first used it just for storage, but in 1981 "The Soapy Murder Case" was moved to the building where they created the current theater.

The group has already started refreshing the building. Two outside walls have been painted, as well as a wall in the men's room. The back-stage will be the next area to get a fresh coat of paint.

New accessible rest rooms and a large deck with an awning at the audience entrance are planned.

The Players have also been creatively working around two approximately 8-inch poles on the stage that are part of the roof support system, and working them into all their productions. Moving the poles will require major structural work, but that is also in the plans.

All of the improvements will need funding far beyond the normal ticket sales and other revenue that funds the plays. To date, the group has been getting architect and engineering reports and details that are needed to apply for grants. MacDonald says they currently have about six grant applications in process. The next step will be the launch of a capital improvement campaign. Community support for the project will then be sought from

the community that has supported The Players over their 97 years.

Donald Gray, an active member since 1974, talks of the storied history of the group. They first presented "Nothing But the Truth" at the Town Hall in January 1921. Through the years, productions were presented in a number of places including the Weston Playhouse, Park Street School, The Hartness House, and the Starlight Room at the Duck Inn. They have also often used the auditorium at Springfield High School for big stage musicals. Some people of note have worked with The Players over the years. Gray says Jill Tracey, a member of the Rogers family all active with The Players, did several episodes of "Scrubs" and appeared on "Quantum Leap" and "Gilmore Girls." Dave Allen now lists three movies on his Facebook page, and Heather McLernon is currently Wardrobe Supervisor for the Boston Ballet.

In recent years, the group has presented three or four plays a year from April through November. They have shut down the building during the winter due to the difficulty of heating the space. The new plan calls for a new HVAC system to allow comfortable year round use. In line with that, MacDonald said he hopes to expand the use to other categories of entertainment.

The Players have announced a fall concert

series for this fall. The four Saturday nights in October will have concerts by Carling and Will, Carl Borgan, Kenneth Rokicki, and Strangled Darlings. MacDonald says each performance is aimed at a different age group. He wants to re-introduce the performance space to the community and hopes it will attract more people who want to get involved. MacDonald also wants to work with other theater groups and make the performance space available to traveling shows.

In the upcoming "The Greater Tuna," Director Stephanie Rowe describes the play as portraying a day in the life of Tuna, Texas, a small town with a population of 20. Actors Tom Field and Tuckerman Wunderle portray all 20 characters, both male and female, changing costumes frequently as they go along. Rowe describes the play as a satire done gently, "not a seething kind of satire." Performances will be August 4, 5, 11, 12 at 7:30 pm in their 80 seat Studio Theater at 165 South Street in Springfield.

Their next production will be "Nunsensations," a spinoff musical of "Nonsense."

Todd Hutchinson has been working to upgrade the group's online presence. They have a website, springfieldcommunityplayers.org, and he is working on a Go Fund Me page for the coming capital campaign.

The organization invites



BILL LOCKWOOD

Tom Field, in costume as Thurston Wheelis, discusses a scene with Director Stephanie Rowe in the Springfield Players' upcoming production of "Greater Tuna."

anyone interested in joining them or seeking information to contact them at (802)885-4098.

THE DIFFERENCE IN WELLWOOD'S IS "FLAVOR"

Pick Your Own Raspberries, Blueberries & Peaches

Call for Conditions
8am - 5 pm • 7 Days
802-263-5200