

# Celebrating local talent

## Play stirs interest in cultural arts



Mark Tubbs as Tobias Gilmore, Marsha's husband; Alyssa Briain as Persis Devore, the decorator; Tonja Hendrix as Marsha's mother, Lynette Thoren; David Taylor as Officer Ben Zuade; and Adam Stanford as Virgil Baxter, Marsha's lovesick neighbor co-star in the slapstick comedy "Let's Murder Marsha," written by Monk Ferris and directed by Tubbs.

By Franie Glass  
franie@netease.net

Parsons' first theater troupe, The Rivertime Players, put a whole new meaning to the words "slapstick comedy" this weekend.

Citizens filed in to take their places inside a redecorated theater and see familiar faces take the forms of cooky, suspicious and downright side-splitting characters in the areas first theater production.

Remembered for their vaudeville tent show performances at the 2007 and 2008 Peavine Festivals, the troupe decided to begin a series of theatre performances after the Cultural and Performing Art Council received a grant to fund the project.

"We want to showcase our local talent," Parsons Mayor Tim Boaz commented about the program. He added that the effort to build Parsons' performing arts community is an educational process when it comes to understanding the value of cultural arts.

Boaz stated the area is rich in local talent and a new performing arts industry can serve as a vehicle to showcase their talent to the community. The program also gives citizens the chance to entertain themselves locally.

This weekend's performance included seven local actors who portrayed bizarre characters in the slapstick comedy "Let's Murder Marsha," written by Monk Ferris. Elicia Spain played the lead as Marsha

MGilmore, a suspense novel addict who thinks her husband is trying to kill her.

Although The Rivertime Players are the city's first theater troupe, Spain is no stranger to the performance world. Before joining the troupe, she performed dance routines and sang with the the Star Spangled Illusion Show. "We all work off of each other," Spain commented. She added that building relationships with her fellow actors is her favorite part of acting.

Adam Stanford amused the audience with his sneaky performance as Virgil Baxter, Marsha's lovesick neighbor who supplies her with poison after she decides to kill her husband in an effort to save her own life.

"It's fun working with the Rivertime Players because it brings more culture to the county," Stanford commented. He joined the troupe last fall during the Peavine Festival and his mother played the piano. The suspicious yet hilarious role of Virgil Baxter came natural to the local actor because he received experience in local plays throughout his life. He played his first role as baby Jesus in a church play.

Alyssa Brittain, a recent Riverside High School graduate, plays the elegant decorator known as Persis Devore and Mark Tubbs plays Tobias Gilmore, Marsha's husband. When Marsha overhears Devore and Gilmore planning her birthday surprise, she assumes the two are in love and want to "get rid" of her and run away

together.

Brittain joined the theater troupe last fall to perform in "The Return of Aunt Susan" at the Peavine Festival after her step-father, Wayle Lyles, helped construct the stage. Although she will soon begin college at Austin Peay to become a physical therapist, Brittain said her favorite part about the acting troupe was bonding with her fellow actors.

"There's more to it than people think there is," Tonja Hendrix commented. She played her first role as Marsha's Mother, Lynette Thoren, who shows up at the end of the play to further confuse the already suspicious characters. According to Hendrix, the hardest part about creating the play was learning all the lines over an eight week time frame.

Other characters included the humorous martini-loving maid Bianca, played by Dotty Hill and her policeman boyfriend Ben Zuade, played by David Taylor. The set, constructed by Parsons City workers, depicted a modern home with a fireplace, bar, telephone and three entryways.

Directed by Mark Tubbs, the play brought in over 150 people Friday and Saturday. Due to the outstanding response, the actors are in the midst of planning a mystery dinner show and will begin practice for the upcoming Peavine Tent Show this July.

Stitches of Love members Helen Templin, Evelyn Griggs and Helen Porter supplied the Municipal Building with new

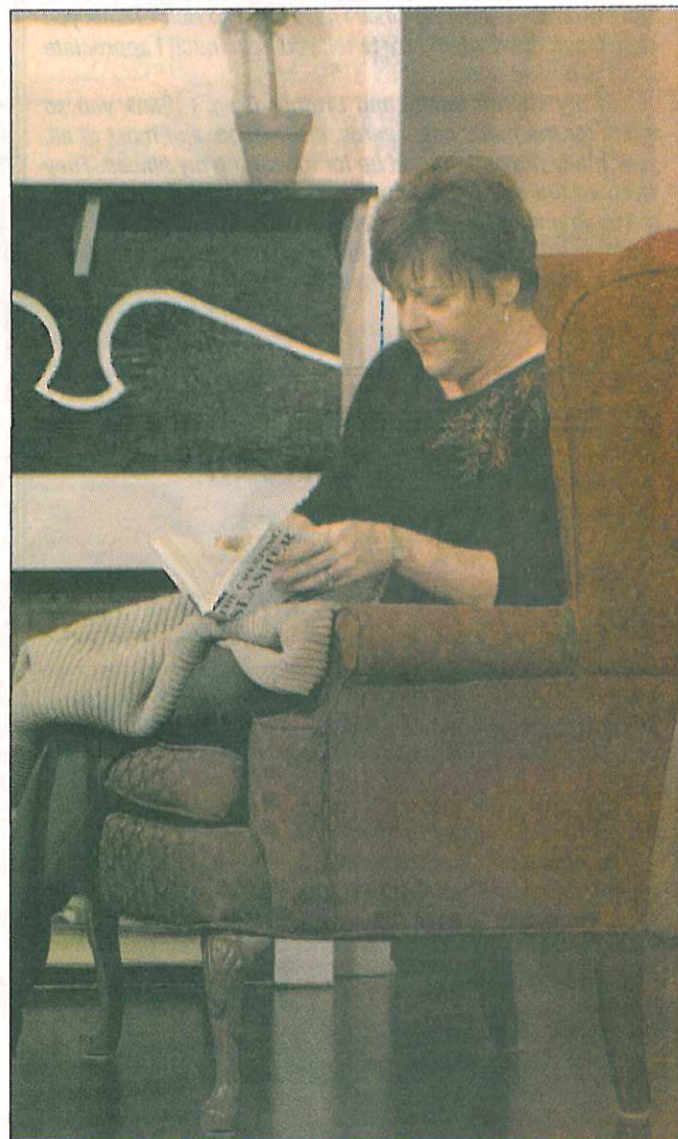


Tobias Gilmore, played by Mark Tubbs, surprises his suspicious wife Marsha, played by Elicia Spain.

patriotic curtains for upcoming performances. "We sewed it all in two days," Griggs commented about her work. "We work and we work hard." She added that the group used 110 yards of material for the curtains and tablecloths at the Municipal Building. The group also makes quilts, lap pads for nursing home patients, drawstring bags for the VA, hats for cancer patients and clothes for babies.

The Rivertime Players Theater Troupe is sponsored by the Community Life Program of the Parsons Cultural and Performing Arts Council. According to Judy King, the council consists of 15 active members who meet once a month. Membership is free and the program finds grants to sponsor local art contests, shows and helps plan the annual Peavine Festival.

Created when the Municipal Building was constructed, the goal of the council is to enrich the quality of community life. The arts council and The Rivertime Players are currently looking for more talent. Interested actors, musicians or artists can contact the Municipal Building at 847-6358 to join.



The lead character Marsha Gilmore, played by Elicia Spain, is a suspense novel addict who thinks her husband is trying to kill her.



Martini-loving Bianca, the maid, played by Dotty Hill and her boyfriend, Police Officer Ben Zuade, are just two of the humorous characters in the cast of the locally-produced "Let's Murder Marsha."