

# OUR TOWN

March 5, 2014

By Rhonda Mitchell

Sitting in the audience watching a play being performed by very young children through teenagers can put you in awe by what you see. The children are enjoying what they are doing and the audience not only is enjoying it, but a sense of pride is instilled in the audience. That's exactly what happens when the Young Rivertime Players hit the stage in Parsons, Tennessee.

This year, 22 children have a part in "Hydrangea Albright: Comedy or Tragedy". It is a story about a theatre which accidentally hires two different playwrights to write a play about Hydrangea Albright. She is a young girl whose family is cursed with bad luck. One writer sees her story as a tragedy filled with disappointment and sadness, while the other playwright sees her story as a whimsical comedy where failure leads to new opportunities.

The writers argue, duel with their pens and even rewrite each other's scenes. The audience gets to meet an array of eccentric characters while they watch a play within a play. The epic tale begins with a cure created by Hydrangea's great-great-grandfather and works its way through several generations, from lightning striking a tuba to a case of uncontrollable hiccups to a tree house destroyed by a piece of the International Space Station.

How many times have you heard the question, "What's in it for me?" Even children ask that question and when you talk to the new cast of this year's production, it doesn't take them long to give you a quick and precise answer!

"This gives us a chance to express ourselves in different characters," noted Molly Lawlor, 13. "It's important to find out who you really are I guess."

Andrew Lawlor, 10, says he's in the play because it is fun. "I get to see my friends and you get to go on stage and perform."

"I do a lot of plays at church," noted 14-year-old Sam Kiehl. "And this is the first time I've ever done something like this. I like the atmosphere. We are really creative and can be really loose. It's a lot of fun. I've laughed so hard, I was in tears. One of the other actors is hilarious. I'm home schooled and this is a good outlet to meet other kids."

Bree Mills, 10, says she just loves acting. "It's fun and I get to act crazy and goofy. You have to be responsible and hard working and learn all your lines and stuff, but I enjoy it and I want to do it right."

"I like the atmosphere of the play," explained Tiffany Flowers, 14. "It's a sense of family when you are working with these other people. I like to be goofy and make people laugh at me. When people laugh at me, it makes me feel good. It can be embarrassing at times, but you grit your teeth and pull through. Working with Shane (Shane Bridges is the director) is amazing. He's an excellent director!"

"This just seems to be fitting," declares Blake Lindsey, 14. "It's something to do, something to occupy your time and it is fun, just fun. You make strong friendships all through playing your character. The plays are always nice and people should come out to see them. They will have a fun time like we do when we are practicing to perform for them."

## What's in it for me?

*Young Rivertime Players set to take a new stage with a new play*



**Young Rivertime Players present:  
Hydrangea Albright:  
Comedy or Tragedy?**

**Production Dates:  
March 28 & 29  
April 4 & 5**

**Location:  
The Hangar,  
former Parsons  
Scott Field Airport**

**Tickets: Adults \$6  
Children 12 and  
under \$2**

When Blake was asked if he thought he was good, he gave a serious thinking look and replied, "Your opinion is what counts!"

"I like being in the play because I get a chance to act out different characters," says Drake Sills, 11. "I get to be another person. You can act out different things and be good at it. It's a great organization to express yourself and you make good friends."

"You do get to act differently than you usually do and really have fun at it," stated Morgan Kiehl, 12. "I just love acting, like doing improv. I like being funny. I like being happy, so I like others being happy."

"I've done little plays in our church and we heard about this and I thought it would be fun trying out," disclosed Emily Varnick, 10. "This is something I've never done before and I was nervous, but now I'm not. I know everyone here and it doesn't matter what age you are. Everyone is friends. I would recommend it to other kids. It's excellent. The hardest part is remembering my lines and the lines that come before me."

Emily's sister, Anna, 9, agrees with Emily's response. "I've never done something like this before either and it's fun. It's funny and there's a lot of fun stuff

we do here. We play games and get to have fun acting. You can be some other person in an imaginary world!"

"It's my passion," declares 9-year-old Cole Powers. "All my life I've wanted to be an actor because it lets me express my inner self into the character I'm playing. My director is like the best. He lets us play games before and then pushes and drives us to get it perfect. It may not be perfect, but it will be good. We all laugh together and it is really special to me. This is the fourth year to be in the play and I plan on doing it all my life!"

"We get to have fun with each other and goof off some," disclosed Weston Flowers, 10. "We talk and really have fun in the play. I can't really describe what makes someone an actor, but I am one."

"I was in the play last year and it was soooo much fun," declares Haylee Smith, 12. "I wanted to be in it again this year. I like getting to act and experience it."

Jake Lyles, 9, has been in the Young Rivertime Players for the past four years, so his acting career began really early in his life.

"He (Bridges) lets us do almost anything we feel like doing to make the show funnier and better," relates Jake. "Since I was in front of lots of people and now when

I get up in school, I'm not as shy now. This is a good thing."

"This is an opportunity for me to work on my speaking skills and help get rid of my shyness," confides Hunter Jordan, 15. "It's good just being here and being around all my friends and just allows me to be myself."

"It gives me something to be in and be a part of something," avows Hollie Wilson, 13. "It's enjoyable being with my friends and all the characters around you. There's a lot of funny, friendly, nice people and no one is ever mean. I hope this can help me with my confidence. I don't really lack confidence, but everyone needs more."

When she was asked if she was any good at acting, she replied. "I wouldn't say I'm bad, but I wouldn't say I'm the greatest either!" Confidence Hollie-confides!

Ryleigh Smith, 14, who has the lead part this year, says her feelings are simple. "I love it and I love acting and showing my creativity through my character. I hope everyone gets to see it because I'm looking forward to seeing them! Come to our show. We worked really hard and you will enjoy it. It's hilarious!"

Bridges says this group of children is filled with some new talent and they are step-

ping into large rolls.

"We lost a couple of key members this year, but these kids are handling the workload marvelously," confided Bridges. "Ryleigh has the title role and has grown tremendously. Madison Goff has really matured and Hollie is new to us this year and is filling the role perfect. It is an ensemble piece and everyone is giving all that I could ask for."

Elicia Spain, Mark Tubbs, Delores Woods and Clayton Quinn are all part of the production cast and agree it is a challenge, but it is definitely worth it.

Spain says she likes watching the children change as they express themselves and watch as their confidence begins to rise. Tubbs says that this year is "neat and different".

"It's a play within a play," explains Tubbs. "It's fast paced and the tone is constantly changing. We've got a lot of kids coming back and we see their growth and the new ones are great too."

This will be the sixth year for the children's production and this year the theater group is "tickled pink" to have a brand new stage and venue in the works. The children's play has been performed in the Parsons Municipal building on a small stage and it did work for a while. Now the actors and

producers want to get the "big time" stage effect!

"We were just thankful to have a space at all!" noted Bridges. "We are so thankful to the City of Parsons, but with children, you need a larger space." The adults won't mind either!

The youth acting group began with seven small actors and this year the cast tops out at 22.

For the past couple of years, Bridges and his "cronies" have been "bending the mayor's ear" asking him to allow the old airplane hangar at the former Scott Field Airport to be developed into a theatrical space for the City of Parsons. Mayor Tim David Boaz finally gave in!

The hangar has 8,000 square feet and it will be perfect for a permanent theatrical performance building. It will seat 250+ people, but it has a long way to go to reach the location's top potential. The stage is well on its way to completion, thanks to the city's support and the labor of the Parsons' street crew. The stage is a whopping 40' X 24' and you'd better believe that "expressing themselves" will have a lot of room when the kids hit this stage!

It's been hard work, but it is also a labor of love for the people who want to support the arts. The theatrical group is asking for people to step forward and help support complete the rest of the project. Additional funds are needed for restrooms, a kitchen for concessions, dressing rooms, back stages, dressing rooms, workshops and heating and air conditioning. The Rivertime Players, Inc. is an IRS recognized 501(c)(3) non-profit organization and all donations will be tax deductible. (Just in case this bit of information "tickles" your pocketbook!)

Decatur County has a lot of sports in the area, but what about the children who are not sports oriented. This is a great creative outlet and a positive learning experience. Theater is a great motivator and surely a benefit any person would love for their child to reap. It's not about being a star. It's about being a part of something, teamwork, camaraderie and skill building which can serve the children for the rest of their lives.

They can express themselves without fear of ridicule, but will welcome the laughter because it is not at them, but with them. Acting helps children find their "voice" and develop confidence and love the experience while doing it. If you watch the children, you can easily see their excitement and watch it bubble over in everything they do. Often it even motivates them to learn and practice in other areas of their changing lives.

Bridges is asking for community support, both in body and monetarily. Acting is a way to show how skills and techniques can be developed if given a chance. There are actual cognitive, physical, emotional and social benefits for the young people in Decatur County through the theater. All they need are some cheerleaders!

The value of our young children does not have a dollar amount attached to it, but you can easily help by showing your support by attending their performances in March and April and also consider making a donation for the completion of the new theatrical performance building.