Off Broad Street Players set sights on future at Levoy

The Off Broad Street Players’ theme for the new season is a bold and optimistic statement that looks to the future—"Goodbye to the old—Hello to the new."

Walter Webster, director of the community theater, typically chooses themes loosely based on the plays to be performed in the upcoming season. But for the 2010 lineup, nothing was more noteworthy than the impending transition to a permanent home at the Levoy Theater in Millville, currently finalizing plans for renovation. The Levoy Theater board hopes the re-building will begin this spring to bring new life to the 102-year-old theater (built in 1908) that saw its last film in the mid-seventies and has been dark ever since, except for a few recent fund raisers.

Lauren Van Embden, chairman of the Levoy Theater board, said the original walls of the theater will be salvaged but the rest of the building, severely damaged over the years by the effects of weather and aging, will have to be replaced.

The theater board enlisted the help of a team of professionals to design and develop construction plans for the renovation of the building. The team included architects, theatre designers, engineers, and Levoy representatives—"all working to achieve a design that would not only ensure the operational success of the building by modernizing the space, but also stay true to the historic character and aesthetics that have been enjoyed in Millville for generations," said chairman Van Embden.

The Players have forged a relationship with the Levoy Theater Board in which all productions will take place at the Levoy once (Continued on next page)
renovations are complete. The transition will be especially noteworthy, since the Players have performed in several venues since its 1998 founding. Its original location for performances and rehearsals was the Trinity United Methodist Church on Fayette Street in Bridgeton, just off Broad Street, from which the troupe gets its name. As the company grew, it moved on to roomier locales—the banquet hall at the Seabrook Volunteer Fire Company, the Guaracini Performing Arts Center at Cumberland County College, Cumberland Regional High School, and Bridgeton High School. After so many moves, a permanent home obviously becomes desirable.

Janet Christy, treasurer and board member of the Players, said the troupe is setting its sights on the November 2010 production of “White Christmas” as the inaugural show for its new home at the Levoy.

Currently the group is preparing for the premiere of the musical “Pippin” at the Broad Street School, West Avenue and Route 49, Bridgeton. The display on this page gives times and ticket prices.

**Background**

“Pippin” is based on the life of Pippin the Hunchback, son of Charlemagne. It debuted on Broadway in 1972 and ran for 1,944 performances before closing in 1977. The director and choreographer was Bob Fosse, and actor/dancer Ben Vereen starred as the “Leading Player.”

**Cast Members**

The Off Broad Street cast consists of: Domonic Barnes of Cedarville as the Leading Player; Andrew Jarema of Pittsgrove, Pippin; Katie Smith of Millville, Catherine; Don Fransko of Vineland, King Charles; Ellen Mather of Bridgeton, Berthe; Heather Harrington of Millville, Fastrada; Andrew Fralinger of Hopewell, Theo; Justin Peterson of Elmer, Lewis; and an ensemble cast of 13.

A live professional orchestra will perform, a standard feature of Off Broad Street musicals. Nancy Bello of Elmer is the conductor. Heather Boner of Bridgeton is the choreographer.

**The Players**

**Domonic Barnes (Leading Player)** has appeared in high school productions of “Bye Bye Birdie,” “Seussical,” and “High School Musical.” He enjoys singing and acting as well as composing music and working with set and lighting design. He has also appeared in the Off Broad Street productions of “Ain’t Misbehavin,’” “Jesus Christ Superstar,” “The Wizard of Oz,” “Hello Dolly” and “All Shook Up.”

**Andrew Jarema (Pippin)** is a sophomore psychology major at Rowan University. He has appeared in high school productions such as “The Boyfriend” and “A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum.” His Off Broad Street credits include “Ordinary People,” “Wizard of Oz” and “All Shook Up.”

**Don Fransko (King Charles)** is self employed at Don’s Guitar Gallery in Millville. One of his hobbies is composing music. He has also appeared in the Off Broad Street productions of “Thoroughly Modern Millie” and “Oklahoma!”