

Blackhorse Players presenting Norm Foster's Office Hours

By Constance Scrafield

The winter season has begun for the Blackhorse Village Players (BVP) with Norm Foster's comedy Office Hours.

The theatre on Highway 9 has a long history in the Tottenham/Caledon area, founded 45 years ago by Pat and Ken Varco and John Milne. While the Varcos left the area some years ago, Milne is still very much part of the local community and a member of Tottenham United Church.

Margaret Phillips, director of the current production, has been part of it all for 40-plus years.

'We moved here from the Westway,' she said in a telephone interview. 'We both wanted a country property and found one out here. We were working in Toronto and commuted but we made it.'

Then, one day, Phillips noticed a sign about a review being done by a local theatre group.

'It didn't interest me much at first,' she reminisced, 'but then I thought, 'I'm just going to phone anyway.' They invited me to come for a reading. I was never a good reader and I was worried I would make a lot of mistakes but I didn't and I got a part.'

It was love at first tread on the boards for Phillips. She really enjoyed the camaraderie of the group and the whole business of being involved in theatre.

'I had never been involved with theatre ever but I thought, 'Oh, well. Just give it a try.'

Over time, she explained, 'I just got more involved. The kids had to come with me. I asked my husband, Gord, to come and give me a hand. So, he did. He still helps out with the scenery.'

For a while after they retired, the Phillips went south, but she said they got bored in Florida.

'I'd rather be home,' she said and, so, became even more involved, now that she was available to help with the shows in the winter, for BVP put on a full season of plays from October to June.

They began this time round with A Little Quickie in October; now presenting Office Hours in January; March and April will see them producing another Norm Foster work, Skin Flick, and then finishing their season in May and June with Ug, the caveman musical, tending this year to comedy.

Over the years, Phillips has been the producer for the shows.

'I like to produce too,' she said. 'The producer sets the cost for everything. And there isn't a lot of money.'

'I have worn a lot of hats over the years and it has all been fun,' she went on to say, 'I have met many wonderful, talented people who have taught me a great deal.'

Indeed, the theatre is run on ticket sales, with all the work being done by volunteers. Donations to the maintenance of the building and producing shows are appreciated as support for the theatre's producing fine quality community theatre for the region.

BVP is a member of the Association of Community Theatres (ACT-CO) and Theatre Ontario and has won several awards, both regional and provincial.

As director for Office Hours, Phillips commented, 'I'm really pleased with the way things are going. Office Hours is such a funny play.'

The basic plot of this satire of the 9-to-5 life revolves around the characters in six different offices within the same city. Sixteen roles are played by nine actors. Naturally, being a Norm Foster play, the writing is witty and the characters are often people we all know.

The stories within the play intertwine as the connection between the diverse individuals becomes apparent.

Having necessarily brought her children with her in the early days, Phillips is happy to tell of their own involvement with the BVP.

Her daughter, Cheryl, began by selling 'chips and pop (in the early days) when we were playing in the Tottenham Town Hall.'

Since then, Cheryl Phillips started to perform by the age of 18 and directed a play for the first time by 28. In this performance of Office Hours, Cheryl is playing two of the roles.

Of her many years with the theatre, Phillips says, 'It keeps me sane.'

Office Hours runs Jan. 16, 17, 18, 22, 23 and 24; evening curtain at 8:15 and Sunday matinee at 2:15 Jan. 18.

For tickets, call 1-905-880-5002 (Box Office)

The Blackhorse Theatre is at 17272 Mount Wolfe Rd. at Highway 9.