

Caledon Townhall Players celebrate 50 years of community theatre

By Constance Scrafield

This region is blessed with a rich arts community, not least of which is theatre.

Not only our fine pros at Theatre Orangeville, but also several community theatres in several villages. Once started, these groups are very long lasting, and a grand example of that is the Caledon Townhall Players (CTHP), celebrating their 50th anniversary this year. As part of the celebration, the group decided to perform some old favourites and are offering for this season the Odd Couple ? Female Version, which they did in the fall. This weekend, they are performing On Golden Pond, introducing the youngest new actor to the fold, Anthony Biase as Billy Ray.

Their theatre is the old Town Hall, built in 1875 and was used as a courthouse and township hall for the former Caledon Township, until this amateur theatrical group began to make their home there.

In June 1962, CTHP presented Angels Unawares and gave their first official performance of Simple Simon Simple in January 1963. Since then, they have staged 120 plays.

In a coffee house conversation with Secretary Judy Lewis and Publicist Jeannette Massicotte about the theatre group and its terrific anniversary, they told us, that the group performs three plays a season from October to May. Rehearsals are three times a week, (depending on the winter weather).

We talked about the changes the hall and its players have seen.

?They used to have outhouses,? Massicotte observed. ?You never think about that now. And, of course, no running water; until 1992 when they got a grant from the Ontario government to install running water and refurbish the Green Lounge.?

Massicotte came to this area from Espanola, where she was likewise involved in amateur theatre. She came here to be with her daughter and help with a growing family but, having no friends here, she was sure she would meet kindred souls by joining in a local theatre group and that is exactly how it worked out.

She told us about having to learn lines in Italian for one of the plays with the CTHP and how everyone supported her with the challenge. By the end of the rehearsals, she was ready.

As always, with any group of actors, her comment was: ?There is great support among actors ? we're like a family.?

Lewis, who is a retired teacher, wanted something interesting and fulfilling to do and told us about her involvement with the theatre group

?You get hooked,? she said. ?I got involved about five years ago because my husband was building sets for them.?

Since coming into CTHP, Massicotte has taken over the job of publicist with all the details and printed matter to oversee.

?It's a great learning curve,? she admitted.

CTHP is a member of Association of Community Theatre of Central Ontario (ACT-CO) and has been nominated and awarded several times over the years for their actors and productions.

In a brief telephone interview, one of the original players Jim Dodds told us, ?I won a prize with the Junior Farmers for acting. At the time, the Caledon, Elora and Dixie Lane associations presented a theatre evening and I won the prize for one of those. I thought I might keep acting, as I liked it and joined the Caledon group. I was in their second play and I've been in a lot of them since then.?

Asked about the changes, he commented, ?Oh, yes, there have been plenty of changes. There were only three light bulbs at first and now it's amazing what can be done with colours and lights. You appreciate when you go to professional theatre what goes on in the background because you know something about it from working with the theatre group.

?Of course, you meet a lot of nice people.?

When asked if he would consider do another role now, his reply was, ?Well, my memory's not as good as it used to be. People used to ask me, ?how do you remember all those lines?' Some of the conversations, you could imagine what was being said but, one time, we did a period piece and we were all in our 40s or younger and the seniors who came never missed a beat. I guess the piece was written when they were younger and they knew it well.?

On Golden Pond is playing at the Old Town Hall in Caledon Village this weekend (Feb. 28 and March 1).

For full details and tickets call the box office at 519-927-5460 or go to www.caledonhallplayers.com