

Erin Theatre is looking for a permanent home

By Constance Scrafield

Kathryn DeLory, artistic director of Erin Theatre, also works as a theatre producer and sometime director at Rose Theatre in Brampton.

"I train, live, breathe theatre and my garden, which I am longing to begin planting," she commented about herself.

Into this theatre-infused life, DeLory includes Erin Theatre for the love of it. She sees the potential of it even though the theatre group currently only produces two shows per year, and one of those is a Christmas dinner theatre event. Yet, the quality of the theatre's production would seem to demand a better budget and more shows.

The troupe recently did a production of *Steel Magnolias*, the famous play set in a hair dresser's shop in Louisiana. Six ladies of very diverse personalities use the saloon as a hub to share gossip and news about their lives. It is a hilarious and witty play with a weighty ending. A play about life, its joys and its tough times.

We met with DeLory and Barb McKee for coffee and a chat recently to talk about Erin Theatre, its contribution to its community and its needs. Like any theatre managers, DeLory and McKee are longing to find a home for the theatre.

As things stand, the group must rent space for productions and store their props, sets and so forth in places from which they must be moved from time to time. Their situation brought to mind memories of a similar situation that confronted Theatre Orangeville not that long ago.

There are buildings in Erin that would suit their needs but negotiations for their use at a low rent are a thing of the future. So, Theatre Erin rents the performance space at the local community centre and presents a dinner-theatre production at David's Restaurant.

For the most part, Erin is deemed to be a hockey town, with a parking lot outside the arena that is mostly packed as the ice time rotates among the teams that use it. A theatre might have success even so, if there were a way to let the good people of Erin know it is there.

"The hard part when you don't have a base, they don't know you exist," DeLory's commented.

"And Erin village is such a great place," McKee added.

"A town exists by its cultural routes," DeLory observed. "You have to rely on the largess of the municipality. They should be looking to support the not for profit organizations."

Theatre Erin raises money for charities. Last year, the group raised \$6,000 for Bethell Hospice. This year, they donated all the proceeds of their March 26 performance to The Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation (JDRF). After the show, the audience was invited to a reception where a JDRF representative hosted a Q & A about juvenile diabetes.

"There's no way we could have (respect) in that community if we didn't give back," McKee said.

As any theatre should, they bring business into the community. The Red Hat matinee recently had a packed house of 185 ladies, who came to Erin for lunch and shopping, as well as to see the play.

That is the balance between cultural events and the economic benefits to a town. It is the ebb and flow of the need for entertainment and the notion that a restaurant meal is an excellent addition to the enjoying the occasion.

Last year, Theatre Erin did a production of *Calendar Girls* that was given nine nominations and won three awards from the Association of Community Theatres of Central Ontario (ACT-CO). DeLory has also won several awards for her direction and production over the years.

It is a small core group that makes it all happen, both on and behind the stage; the core that sticks with Theatre Erin year after year. Their enthusiasm is tremendous. Some of the actors are so good and such favourites with the audiences that DeLory takes them in her consideration when she is deciding on the next play they will perform.

"We work with a core because of the attitude everybody does everything the ultimate in multi-tasking," she said. "We didn't have an Artistic Director there was a president and a vice president. There needs to be a mandate. The people who work behind the stage, they rely on us to make the right decisions about the material."

After a pause, she admitted, "I wouldn't involve myself in theatre outside my full time theatre life if I didn't love it."