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After 70 years: The Wilton Playshop is looking to revitalize theater

By Robin Walluck

The Wilton Playshop is celebrating its 70th birthday, and community members hope to give it a facelift, inside and out. A new board for The Wilton Playshop has come together to spruce up the inside of the red building down Lovers Lane behind the Wilton Congregational Church.

In 1937, the curtain rose on The Wilton Playshop's first performance, "The Tavern." It was performed at the Old Town Hall, and according to news reports, there was dancing after the performance — it was a community event.

"We're trying to make it the gem of the community," said Janice Dehn, publicity chair of The Wilton Playshop Board of Directors.

Walking into the playshop one is met with a pungent smell of mold, dust and whatever else years and years of existence brings. The playshop is crowded with props and costumes. The current board of the playshop has been working on salvaging what hasn't been damaged by mold and organizing supplies.

"For whatever reason, it kind of fell down to a very small group of people who love this place," said Laura Connell, volunteer chair. "It's not anyone's fault, it was a series of unfortunate events."

In a recent interview, board members said performances at the playshop were lacking, and sometimes the audience was less than a handful of people. Something needed to be done, they said.

"For years, we have said ... we would like to be involved with The Wilton Playshop," Jane Alexander said.

She said she was a little reluctant getting involved with the organization because she doesn't have a background in performing or theater. But, she found it doesn't matter, things need to be done at the playshop that don't need a theater major's touch. As a board member, she is chair of the box office.

All interviewed said they have seen the playshop at its best.

"We know the potential," Ms. Alexander said. "You don't have to be a theater person to get involved."

Ralph Pastore, the fund-raising chair, performed at The Wilton Playshop "many years ago." He said the shows he was in were "high quality." As a teen, he wanted to audition for the playshop; he said he doesn't think that's the case now.

"It would be nice to get the hustle and bustle back again," Mr. Pastore said.

Getting started

"Right after I moved here, I jumped right into" performing at the playshop, Zellie Pforzheimer said. For years, she did shows, but all of the sudden "there was no backing."

Ms. Pforzheimer is the president of the board. She said for several years the board members of the playshop didn't have enough free time to devote to keeping the playshop viable.

"Now we have several who are able to devote the time we need," Ms. Pforzheimer said.

There are the people on the board, but there needs to be outside help.

"We need everything, from floor to ceiling," Ms. Pforzheimer said, adding the board is attempting to be as honest as possible. They know the playshop is not in the best shape, but it can be fixed, board members said.

Community



Members of The Wilton Playshop board are looking to breathe life into the 70-year-old organization. From left are, Jane Alexander, Janice Dehn, Zellie Pforzheimer, Laura Connell and Ralph Pastore. —Bryan Haeffele photo

Ms. Alexander said the playshop is going to be “a little more special.”

“You want to make sure everyone feels welcomed,” she said. You don’t have to have a specialized talent to join, just make the commitment if you join for one show. You can come once if it’s helping to spruce up the building, board members said.

The board members said they want the playshop to be a place where people can go with their family to spend a night out. For Valentine’s Day, members said they hope to do something special — maybe take down the risers in the audience, for a cabaret-style show. The plans are still in the works.

For the first show of the new season, the playshop will perform “A Christmas Story,” beginning Nov. 30, after that, members are bouncing ideas off one another. They even plan on renting out the space.

“There just needs to be a very organized effort to make sure this doesn’t happen again,” Ms Pforzheimer said, referring to the sub-par condition of the building. “The community is what is going to make it such a success.”

Ms. Dehn echoed Ms. Pforzheimer by saying the board hopes to have a community volunteer day in the future. Having volunteers take a day to do one or two things, that’s what is going to bring the playshop back, she said.

The board members also addressed a common complaint they hear from residents: When people would call The Wilton Playshop, often their calls weren’t returned.

“We will call you back,” Ms. Pforzheimer said. “We are working to rebuild that perspective in the community.”

Information: 762-7629, or wiltonplayshop.org.

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