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Arts & Leisure

**With a solid structure and a new roof,**

## The Wilton Playshop looks to the future

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by **JULIE WEISBERG**

After spending much of the last year refurbishing and repairing its ailing building, the Wilton Playshop has emerged as a revitalized community theater organization, looking to rebuilding its reputation for quality productions and expanding its programming.

As part of that effort, the playshop will begin to offer a Shakespeare Drama Club for elementary school-level students in April. The workshop will run for eight weeks and culminate in a performance.

According to Wilton Playshop Board of Trustees President Zelig Pforzheimer, the club will not only be a fun and confidence-building experience for students, but also an opportunity to boost their reading, writing and vocabulary skills

— as well as their appreciation for the theater.

“I know the difference that theater has made in the lives of children,” Ms. Pforzheimer said.

In addition, the playshop will have a summer theater camp for children next year. The camp will run for two, two-week sessions beginning at the end of June.

The playshop’s new children’s program will be led by head instructor Tiffany Soares, the creator and director of the elementary-level drama program for Yonkers Public Schools, where she was nominated for teacher of the year in 2007.

Ms. Pforzheimer said that to the best of her knowledge, this is the first time that the

playshop as offered acting workshops to children.

“This will be a new venture for us... but this is a direction we definitely want to go in,” she said.

Ms. Pforzheimer added that the playshop’s board is excited to have Ms. Soares as one of its newest members.

“I think she is brilliant,” she said of Ms. Soares. “She has put on some really excellent pieces of theater.”

### **Temporary setback**

In early October, the playshop was forced to temporarily close its doors after significant structural and roof damage was discovered during the building’s refurbishment effort.

This led the theater to postpone its production of *A Christmas Story*, which was to scheduled to run through this year’s holiday season.

But Ms. Pforzheimer said that every cast member would keep his or her part until next year, when the board expects the show to open its 2008-09 season in late November.

In the meantime, the Westport Community Theater opened up its performance space to the playshop, allowing the *A Christmas Story* actors to give staged readings of their play. The two readings, which took place in mid-December, also served as a fund-raiser for the Wilton organization.

Since the organization’s new board took the helm in June, board members and volunteers have spent much of their free time at the playshop, cleaning, and organizing set pieces, lighting equipment, props, and costumes, Ms. Pforzheimer said.

Many of those costumes have been professionally cleaned — at a discounted rate — by Wilton River Cleaners in Wilton. Ms. Pforzheimer said the shop has been extremely helpful to the theater.

They have shown “faith and belief in a community organization,” Ms. Pforzheimer said of the cleaners.

Although the building is now structurally sound, other general cosmetic repairs to theater are still needed and the organization itself is in several thousands of dollars in debt.

“The building is safe now,” Ms. Pforzheimer said. “Now, we are dealing with comfort issues.”

And so, the board is now in the planning stages for a major fund-raising performance it will hold on March 8. The event will feature two different performance times on the same day, at three different ticket-price levels: \$200, \$150 and \$75. At the \$200 level, theater-goers will be treated to dinner at a private home after the show.

Ms. Pforzheimer, an experienced theater professional, said the March benefit will feature local professional and semi-professional “theater people” in both performances.

“It’s going to be a musical evening,” she said.

In the meantime, board members and volunteers continue to work on improving the playshop both physically and organizationally.

Ms. Pforzheimer said it has been a difficult path to tread — with many highs and lows along the way — but a journey that has been well worth both the time and the effort.

“The outpouring of support has really kept me going,” she said. “You know, it is all of the little things that make Wilton a unique place, and the playshop is one of them... I feel so strongly that it has to be preserved.”

For more information, visit [wiltonplayshop.org](http://wiltonplayshop.org).

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