

THE MAGAZINE

Dedicated to the People and Places of Central Kansas

March 2024
Volume 3, No. 2



Theatre education

Theatre Salina is set to grow its building to expand fine arts education for region.

Ties to Ukraine run deep

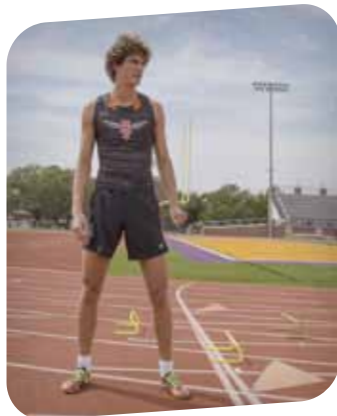
Former Saline County educator spent her childhood summers in Ukraine.

End of an era

Linda Mowery-Denning, founder of The Magazine died Nov. 4.

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The Magazine founder dies

Editor's note: Linda Mowery-Denning, the founder of The Magazine, died Nov. 4. This commentary was her last published piece in the Salina Journal (March 27, 1999), and also read at her funeral. It feels like a fitting tribute to publish it on the pages of the magazine she founded.

Years ago, a friend tried to talk us into moving to Overland Park.

My husband's response was, "I'm married to a woman who thinks Mingo, Kan., is the most beautiful place in the world. There's no way to get her to the city."

I thought of that story earlier this week as my car passed the exits off Interstate Highway 70 to the towns of north-central and northwest Kansas.

Lincoln. Ellsworth. Sylvan Grove. Dorrance. Wilson. Russell. Gorham. Victoria. Ellis. WaKeeney. Ogallah. Quinter. Grinnell. Grainfield. Oakley. Colby. Levant. Goodland. Mingo, with its twin grain silos, endless sky and Willie Engelhardt, the man to call about weather, crop conditions and other issues of importance to the farmers and ranchers of northwest Kansas.

When I first saw this country in the heat of late summer almost 27 years ago, I thought time had stopped somewhere around 1935. There was the wind and the dust. And the isolation. And the huge fields stretching to nowhere. This was strange land for a girl reared in the rich soil of Indiana. There the towns and villages and farms are maintained with an eye to the neighbor's property. Fill your barnyard with old machinery and you get talk-



Linda Mowery-Denning

ed about. Neatness is a sign of prosperity, whether it's true or not.

I was to learn Kansas offered no such luxury. Life is often hard here, especially on the Great Plains west of Salina. A farmer's spare time is better spent in church praying for enough rain to raise the wheat crop than it is mowing a yard that's bigger than the one your neighbor tends.

I learned about endurance and pride in family and community. Dean Banker can be found most days at the Russell department store established more than a century ago by his family. Similar stores in Norton, Concordia and other rural towns are gone, their customers lured to larger communities by giant merchandisers like Walmart. Despite the challenges, Banker's sense of humor is always intact, and his inventory and

service top-notch.

The same is true for Jim and Kathryn Cleland. They operate a pharmacy and lunch counter at WaKeeney. This day, Jim Cleland prepared for the town's annual celebration of Scot customs. The lunch hour was filled with laughter and talk of the party.

Across rural Kansas, from Abilene to Atwood, from Lindsborg to Lincoln, from Sharon Springs to Smith Center, citizens have worked for decades to make a place for themselves and their families.

I joined them Friday. That was the day fellow Journal reporter Sharon Montague and I left the Journal to start our own weekly newspaper in Ellsworth. It was time to make the move from spectator to participant. Our paper will be called the Ellsworth County Independent, a tribute to

the spirit of this state.

Most of my professional life has been spent covering the small towns along the interstate and other roads of north-central and northwest Kansas. For years, I've written stories about the determination of some communities, the almost self-destructive nature of others. I've interviewed rural sociologists, the New Jersey professors who wanted to turn western Kansas into a home for the buffalo and countless others with more theory than sense.

We don't have the answer any more than they do. Just the other night someone accused me of having more nerve than sense. They might be right.

What we do have is a commitment to rural Kansas and an appreciation of the issues that continue to change the lives of those who live there. We want to be part of a place that I have come to consider special. This is home.

So, to everyone who has helped me over the years — thank you. And don't be surprised if I'm on the telephone in the next week or next month wanting to talk about Kansas.

What I'm planning to do in the future won't be that different from what I've done in the past. Only the name of the newspaper will change.

Linda Mowery-Denning was founder of The Magazine. After working at the Salina Journal for almost 27 years, she and business partner Sharon Montague started the Ellsworth County Independent, which in 2001 merged with the Ellsworth Reporter. Mowery-Denning wrote for the I-R and the Marquette Tribune after retiring as editor/publisher. Mowery-Denning was preceded in death by her husband, Peter, and is survived by children Matthew and Allyn.

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On the cover: Volunteers perform in “The Wizard of Oz” at Theatre Salina Nov. 15. Pictured, from left, are Kinsleigh Showman, Andrew Graber, Camille Graber, Mara Mondt and Alicia DeHaan. (Photo by Karen Bonar/The Magazine)

The Magazine, dedicated to the People and Places of Central Kansas, is published in March, July and November by the Ellsworth County Independent-Reporter.

Editor-Publisher — Karen Bonar
Advertising — Orlita Dobkins
Design — Karen Bonar, Bill Beckmeyer

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KAREN BONAR/The Magazine

Gary Demuth directs curtain call for the Theatre Salina production of “Into the Breeches” in October.

Volunteers are cornerstone of Theatre Salina

BY GARY DEMUTH
The Magazine

I have been an actor and director at Theatre Salina (formerly Salina Community Theatre) for more than 25 years. In my mind, the theatre’s many decades of success and recognition can be credited primarily to a single factor: the commitment and dedication of its many community volunteers.

Volunteers have been the essential lifeblood of the theatre since its founding in 1960 to the present day, attracting generations of community players and production staff members who enter its doors with a passion and dedication to bringing the best of live theatre to audiences in the city they call home.

These volunteers spend countless hours backstage moving sets, gathering props or sewing costumes; up in the light booth running lights, sound or spotlights; or sharing their talents onstage, bringing a diversity of characters to life in plays and musicals.

These volunteers are not professional theatre people. They live in Salina and the surrounding commu-

nities and work as doctors, lawyers, accountants, nurses, teachers, graphic designers, pharmacists, truck drivers, delivery people and journalists, as well as a myriad of other jobs and professions.

They are White, Black, Asian and Hispanic. They are conservative and liberal. They are believers and atheists. They are straight and gay. They are students and retirees. They are financially secure and struggle paycheck-to-paycheck.

But when these diverse people volunteer their time at the theatre, the labels that define them in their lives are put aside and they enter the doors as equals, coming together as a team to create the best show possible for the entertainment of their peers sitting in the audience.

Some of them are longtime volunteers who have extensive performing experience, while others are auditioning for their first show. The beauty of a community production is this mixture of beginners and veterans and seeing how a veteran will help a newcomer gain poise and con-

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Theatre Salina moves forward with addition

BY KAREN BONAR
The Magazine

The final note reverberates through the theatre, the lights dim and the applause begins. The lights come up, and the actors take their bows.

Performances on the main stage and in the black box theatre are only a portion of Theatre Salina's story, though. While audiences are probably most familiar with main stage theatrical productions, Theatre Salina has a rich history of arts education.

"When we built this building, we hoped we would have 150 student registrations," Theatre Salina Executive Director Michael Spicer said. "We pretty quickly exceeded that."

The education expansion was complete in 2011 and

included the lobby, black box theatre, two classrooms in the basement, as well as a costume shop in the basement.

"It gave us actual classroom spaces and it gave us costume storage," Spicer said. "Before that, most of the costumes were stored in plastic bags in the basement of the old Brown Mackie building. The storage space was donated to us. We could use it, but it wasn't ours."

The theatre is once again expanding to make additional room for education.

"We will gain three educational areas," Spicer said. "A dance studio, a changing area for students, a second dance studio, lots of glass. There will be a lobby behind these for parents and students to wait. Behind is a vocal performance studio."

The current expansion began with the Smoky Hill River project. Theatre Salina's current storage space near the water, at the back of the property, will have to move. The idea of moving storage snowballed into additional improvements for the facility. Preliminary plans include an addition to the scene shop on the northwest side of the existing theatre, as well as adding an education wing to the west side of the property.

Performing arts education is essential to Theatre Salina, which is classified as a community theatre.

Maggie Spicer Brown, education director for Center Theatre Arts at Theatre Salina, was one of the earliest participants in classes for Theatre Salina's

Center for Theatre Arts.

"We've always been passionate about theatre education," she said. "We had camps early on. When we re-branded (as Center for Theatre Arts), we were able to expand and hone in on acting classes and camps."

"Especially this season, being able to provide a comfortable environment for youth who transfer from classes to our stage was important."

The current season includes "Matilda the Musical," with a host of children in the cast, as well as "The Wizard of Oz" with a variety of youth in the cast.

"We had a need for music theatre classes, especially as we talk about programming shows," Spicer Brown said.

Two leads for "Matilda the Musical" were cast, and both are current CTA students. Dual-casting is nothing

Expanding education



Artist rendering of the proposed Theatre Salina expansion.

Courtesy photo

ing new at Theatre Salina.

Emily Afton, who grew up in Salina as Emily Thompson, is currently performing in "Hadestown" on Broadway. The 2003 Salina South High School graduate said her first onstage role was in 1994 at Theatre Salina. Several years later, in 1997, she was cast as the Artful Dodger in "Oliver!"

"Doing 'Oliver!' was one of the best experiences, partly because they double-cast it," Afton said. "I was playing the same role every other night as my best friend."

While heavily involved with theatre at Salina South, Afton said Theatre Salina holds special memories.

"One thing I liked about Salina Community Theatre was I got to be in the show with adults," she said. "I had really nice mentor relationships."

John Henningsen is a 1998 Salina South High School graduate. He has

"We know they take the skills they learn to forensics or debate, speak in front of their classmates safely and confidently,"

Maggie Spicer Brown

Education Director for Center Theatre Arts at Theatre Salina

deep ties with Theatre Salina, starting in grade school and high school. He served as a college intern and guest director in 2003 before joining the staff in 2007 as the education director, a position he held until 2011.

"As a high school student working on main stage productions, it was the first time I was treated as a colleague or friend rather than a kid," he said.

Henningsen was present during the previous education expansion. The current expansion, which is in early stages, will help expand class offerings.

Since 2018, Spicer said the program has had more than 350 stu-

dent registrations each year, with a slight dip during the pandemic.

"As soon as we were able, it bounced back to over 300. Last year it exceeded 350," he said. "This year it exceeded 450."

Spicer Brown, who graduated from Salina South High School in 2010, was one of the earliest participants.

"I was taking dance classes with Peggy Simms," she said. "She was working with us to establish a dance program. I was one of the first CTA dance students."

Spicer Brown went on to work professionally in regional theatre and was also on the national tour of Andrew Lloyd Weber's

"The Wizard of Oz."

Yet, she said theatre education is not limited to those in grade or high school.

"We offer more classes, especially to adults, because it invests to those who are on our stage," Spicer Brown said. "It makes it more comfortable for those on our stage."

She knows not all students will go on to careers in the arts, but believes the foundation provided in theatre and arts education is vital.

"We know they take the skills they learn to forensics or debate, speak in front of their classmates safely and confidently," Spicer Brown said. "We had a parent say their child was more confident, less anxious. We go out of our way to continue to take care of the mental and emotional health of our students."

See EDUCATION Page 8



Artist rendering of the proposed dance studio.

Courtesy photos

EDUCATION

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Drawings for the expansion are preliminary, and Spicer said a capital campaign is in early days.

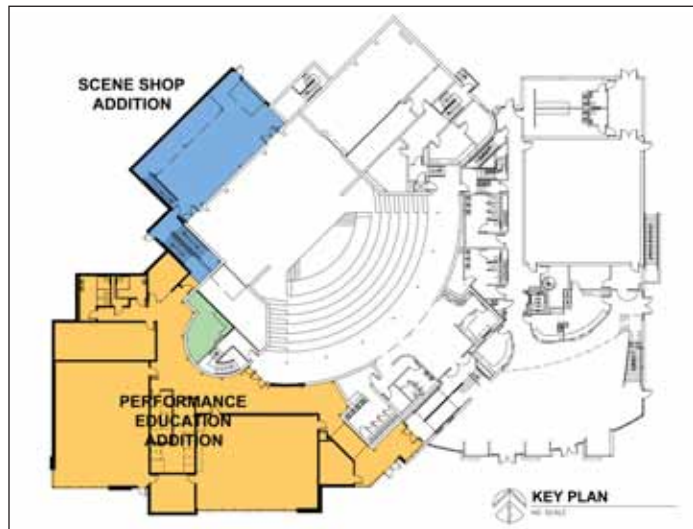
“We embraced the idea of a new education building,” Spicer said. “We said, ‘If we’re going into a real capital campaign, we need to try to encompass not only construction future, but education future,’ because that’s where so much growth and expansion has happened for us.”

Preliminary plans are to add 7,500 square feet for education, as well as 1,700 square feet for the scene shop.

“It will have a lot of natural light coming into those studios, which we don’t have,” Spicer said of the education wing. “We’ll have a comfortable lobby for students, we’ll have a task table where they can charge devices or do homework between classes.”

Investing in arts education helps craft well-rounded individuals.

“Theatre is the art of storytelling to ourselves so we learn who we are,” Spicer said. “Sometimes it’s dark and messy, like ‘Death of a



Artist rendering of proposed additions to Theatre Salina. The blue portion is the addition to the scene shop. The yellow is the proposed education wing.

Salesman,” and sometimes it’s light and funny like female “Odd Couple.” Sometimes it’s a traditional story you’ve heard all your life and it’s presented and you understand it in a new way like “The Wizard of Oz.”

Carrie Gilchrist, a 1996 Salina South High School graduate, was involved with Theatre Salina throughout her youth.

She is now the Artistic and Executive Director of the Lovell Institute, which

started in Salina.

“You want your children to know how to collaborate and communicate and express themselves and be creative,” she said. “You need those things, no matter what you do with your life. Those are things you learn in the arts and you use it in any path you go down.”

Once final plans are available the capital campaign is formalized, information will be available at salinatheatre.com.

HISTORY OF THEATRE SALINA

Theatre Salina was founded as Salina Community Theatre by Charles Kephart in 1960. That fall, Kephart became the theatre’s managing artistic director. The organization was under his artistic guidance for the next 35 years. During that period, he directed 136 plays.

From 1960 to 1970, the home of the theatre was the old Washington High School on Mulberry Street. When that building was torn down, the theatre performed its plays at Kansas Wesleyan University until 1973, when it moved to its present location on Iron Street.

In 1991, the scene shop, rehearsal room and offices were added. Theatre Salina again expanded its building in 2011 with a renovation that added classroom space, costume space, an expansive lobby and the Sunflower Financial (black box) Theatre.

VOLUNTEERS

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fidence so that all can shine come opening night.

As any good director will tell you, casting a show with just the right actors is the hardest part of the whole production process. You must use your gut instinct to find people who will blend best onstage, no matter what their level of experience. There are volunteers at auditions who dazzle with their script readings, while others stumble and fret over each line. A good director can see the possibilities in the stumblers and won't necessarily be swayed by the dazzlers. It's all about finding a cast with chemistry who together will be dedicated to producing the best show possible.

Regardless of who is ultimately cast in a play or musical, those auditioning are not professional actors with practiced thick skins. As a director, treating everyone who

auditions with respect and dignity is paramount. If these volunteers are not made to feel valued for giving their valuable time to attend auditions, why would they want to come back to try out for anything else? Thanking them for their time, showing appreciation for their talents and urging them, if not cast, to audition for other shows is vitally important.

As anyone who has been involved in a show can tell you, putting together a good production takes a long time. A play is generally put together in six to seven weeks, while a big musical may take up to three months of rehearsal, four to five days a week. After that, volunteers are asked to reserve three to four weekends of their lives while the show is running. That's a lot of sacrifice to ask of people who work all week at a demanding job or are busy raising children.

But volunteers are willing to make this sacrifice

because they love the theatre, a passion that for many was sparked in childhood. They love the camaraderie and family-like atmosphere that is created between cast members and production and backstage crew during rehearsals and the run of the show. They feel fulfilled and challenged emotionally, physically and intellectually through sharing their acting, singing, dancing and organizational skills to bring a production to life.

And when opening night comes, if the audience cheers and applauds and gives the cast and crew a standing ovation to show appreciation for all they've accomplished, all the hard work, time sacrifices and rehearsal joys and frustrations will have been worth it.

Now, it's true that theatre can grow into an addiction to those in need of constant validation and applause, but as far as addictions go, theatre is one of the most ful-

filling to mind, body and soul. And once you experience the highs of theatre, it's hard to stop coming back.

So as Theatre Salina moves into its next phase of growth, expanding its educational wing to help train future generations of performers, let's never forget the volunteers who made the success of Theatre Salina possible in the first place. Volunteers who have continued to show up for nearly 65 years, donating their time and energy with the singular goal of creating a piece of living art together.

Salina Community Theatre and now Theatre Salina has been fortunate to have attracted a stellar community of volunteers since its beginning, and the city, surrounding communities and the state of Kansas have been culturally richer for it.

So take a bow, volunteers, to another 65 years and beyond. The show must go on!



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Where are

Theatre Salina was a launching pad for a variety of performing artists. The Magazine talked with a few familiar faces to see where they are now and how Salina shaped them as artists

Emily Afton

Salina tie:

2003 Salina South High School graduate

Years at TS:

1994-2004; 2009

(formerly Emily Thompson)

Best memory from time at TS:

Doing "Oliver!"

was one of the best experiences. They double cast it because they had such a long run. I was playing the same role every other night as my best friend. Everybody I liked and knew was in the show. It was my first time getting to sing a solo. I did an accent. Even though it was my first thing, it was one of the very best memories.

What has stayed with you from TS?: I learned all of the basics there. The foundationals. All of the really, really essential stuff you need to know to begin — stage directions, how to project and enunciate, how to memorize lines, what it's like to be in a rehearsal.

What have you been doing since? "Hadestown" on Broadway since December 2021, "Amélie" and "Hair" on Broadway, three national tours, touring nationally and internationally as a singer with various bands, voiceovers, commercials, regional theatre.

Biggest accomplishment since departing TS? Being able to support myself by performing. It's vague, but the fact that I went to school for musical theatre and I graduated and have been working. I've been able to keep doing that and make my living in New York. That's what makes me feel the most accomplished.



Simeon Rawls

Salina tie:

2012 Salina South High School graduate

Years at TS:

2008-13; 2022

Best memory from time at TS:

I didn't consider myself a dancer yet. I was watching spring fling. I remember being a

14-year-old watching Peggy Simms and Marnie Mattek tap to "We're in the Money" from "42nd Street." It was life-changing. I went up to Peggy and said 'I want to be a dancer.' I personally credit my whole dance career to Peggy because she got me started on that.

What has stayed with you from TS?: I really learned what hard work is and being a team player. TS is such as community love letter. It's all of the community coming together. As a young artist, I learned what it was to work with others and create a piece of art and love that goes not only to the audience, but ourselves.

What have you been doing since? Hershey Park; Bush Gardens; Cunard (British cruise line); Norwegian Cruise Lines, "Beauty and the Beast" at John W. Engeman Theater in New York; other regional theatre.

Biggest accomplishment since departing TS? I'm really proud that I've got to work in almost every form of performance. I always wanted to try a theme park. I always wanted to do a cruise. I've got to do regional theater around the United States. I wanted to do a show in New York. I think overall, the cruise. I got paid to see the world and go to places I would have never gone to.



Nick Salem

Salina tie:

2018 Salina South High School graduate

Years at TS:

Third grade through high school. Even after I graduated high school, I came back for a summer or two and did shows.

Best memory from time at TS:

"West Side Story" was very special to me because it was the first and only show that Scott (my older brother) and I were both in (together). The role was a real stretch for my quiet self. I played Action and he was a big rageful ball of energy.

What has stayed with you from TS?: SCT showed me what it felt like to be in a theatre community before I got to the city. That was invaluable.

What have you been doing since? Understudy for off-Broadway's "You Don't Have to Do Anything," which opened Feb. 8. I understudy two roles. If one or the other actor is sick or something happens, I can step into their role. It's been rewarding being in the room and watching everyone work. It's an incredible learning experience.

Biggest accomplishment since departing TS? This show is nice, that's for sure.

The biggest accomplishment is I feel very comfortable where I'm at. I feel comfortable being in the city, I feel like I've found friends and ways of living here that sustain myself. For me, I think it's a bigger accomplishment than any show.



they now?

Tyrees Allen

Salina tie: 1972 Salina High School graduate (present day Salina Central High School); 1978 Marymount graduate
Years at TS: Started in 1970 or 71



Best memory from time at TS: That's too hard. I have lots of memories — picking one is impossible.

What has stayed with you from TS?: The spirit of the people I had the good fortune to learn from.

What have you been doing since? Working in theatre and television.

Biggest accomplishment since departing TS? I suppose it would be that I've been able to make a living as an actor all these years. I've been fortunate.

Erin Debold

Salina tie: 2003 Salina South High School graduate



Years at TS: 1996-2003
Best memory from time at TS: My favorite was the summer after I graduated, "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat." Half of the cast was class of 2003. It was fun hanging out with all of my friends. It was an amazing group of performers. It was having fun onstage with people you know and trusted.

What has stayed with you from TS?: Anyone can be a dancer, can be a performer. Thinking about what community theatre is about ... it's about community. There aren't any barriers to participate.

What have you been doing since? Director of Annual Giving at Lincoln Center. I run all individual giving opportunities for the world's largest performing arts organization.

Biggest accomplishment since departing TS? In my mind, it's still to come.

Nathan Tysen

Salina tie: 1995 Salina South High School graduate



Years at TS: 1988-1995
Best memory from time at TS: SCT was one of the very first theatres to produce "Tuck Everlasting" after it closed on Broadway. It was directed by Kate Lindsay (my high school drama teacher and dear friend). Michael Spicer flew me out to work with the cast, see the show, give a master class and give a talk to all the fifth and sixth graders of USD 305. It was a full-circle moment for me. If you tell me to imagine a theatre, I close my eyes and see SCT. It was the place for many seminal creative moments, so to be sitting in the audience and see my own work on a stage that shaped so much of who I am was an unforgettable experience.

What has stayed with you from TS?: At 16 I wrote my very first song on the grounds of SCT as part of a summer workshop called Lovewell Institute for the Creative Arts. Standing onstage hearing my peers sing something I wrote was an unforgettable feeling. I have been chasing that feeling for over two decades now as a professional songwriter. I also am grateful to still feel connected to the SCT community and treasure the support and friendships that continue to this day.

What have you been doing since? I moved to New York in 1999. I have been writing songs (and the occasional book) for theatre and television. I have written lyrics for four Broadway shows: "Tuck Everlasting," "Amélie," "Paradise Square" and started rehearsals in February for "The Great Gatsby."

Biggest accomplishment since departing TS? Being nominated for a Tony award in 2022 and my family — wife and fellow writer Kait Kerrigan and our daughters Lucy and Tess.

Christian McQueen

Salina tie: 2018 Kansas Wesleyan University graduate

Years at TS: 2015-18

Best memory from time at TS: My favorite show was "In The Heights," both artistically and the people we had in the show.

What has stayed with you from TS?: Do the work and show up. When other people are too tired or they think, 'It's not worth it.' I'm the one guy who says, 'I'm



going to show up.' I'm going to be as kind and inviting and fun as possible. I think above anything, people just love it when you show up.

What have you been doing since? Regional theatre around the country. Every time I do a contract, I want it to be 1 percent better than the last contract. With every contract, I learn more what I want out of this career. I love the progression I'm on.

Biggest accomplishment since departing TS? "Anastasia" the national tour, both when I was in ensemble and then in the role of Gleb. It was easily the most fulfilling artistic and genuine experience of my entire life. I was touring the country doing what I love with people who light my soul up. It was the greatest opportunity I've ever had in my life.

Where are

Morgan Parker

Salina tie: 2016 Ell-Saline Jr./Sr. High School graduate; 2020 Kansas Wesleyan University graduate

Years at TS: 21 shows in the pit for percussion

Best memory from time at TS: I played my first show and got paid for it at 14. I'm so grateful. It opened my eyes to a world I hadn't known existed. It opened me to a plethora of genres of music I wasn't exposed to yet. It opened a can of worms that turned into my entire life, which is where I am now.

What has stayed with you from TS?: When I was younger, I had the mindset that you have to be strong enough to carry your own gear. I still do that now to this day. I'm grateful for that experience because it's helped me now. Also, networking; starting young and learning how to network and communicate with people.

I remember starting to make connections in Salina. That's how it grew. The same thing here, it's on a different scale.

What have you been doing since? Subbing in the pit of "A Beautiful Noise" on Broadway; stage manager for New York Pops (orchestra), which performs at Carnegie Hall; freelance work; bands; regional theatre.

Biggest accomplishment since departing TS? Everything. I'm completely proud of myself for giving it a 100 percent go. I came here, got my masters, subbed on Broadway within six months of graduating. I stayed afloat, continued to get my name out. Each time I play the next job or work with someone, it keeps going. Just doing the damn thing is the biggest accomplishment. It is a really hard scene. It is brutal as much as it is fun, and the greatest time of my life.



Being positive and loving what I do is the biggest accomplishment.

John Henningsen

Salina tie: 1998 Salina South High School graduate

Years at TS: Throughout grade school and high school; college intern; guest director in 2003; education director 2007-11

Best memory from time at TS: One memory that still makes me smile is Charles Kephart sneaking into rehearsal.

I was education director and directing "HONK!" with the middle school group. They were (and are) an amazing group of performers. This was 2010 maybe, right as we were building the new education wing and we had run out of room at the theater so we were rehearsing onstage at the old Roosevelt-Lincoln-turned senior living buildings. Charles was living there at the time and one day while the kids were doing a run-through, I heard laughing from the balcony. I looked up and I saw Charles Kephart had snuck into the theater and was thoroughly enjoying the show!

What has stayed with you from TS?: The people. Salina Community Theatre really was a community of artists. There are so many people that put their heart and soul



into productions and into making the theatre a home-away-from-home. As a high school student working on main stage productions, it was the first time I was treated as a colleague or friend rather than a kid. Many of them are gone now, but I have many fond memories of working on productions with these incredible people.

What have you been doing since? John is a creative producer with more than two decades of experience in performing arts management across the United States, including Los Angeles, New York, Kansas

City and Chicago. He is also the founding executive director and owner of the award-winning arts incubator, ThymeLe Arts, Hollywood, Calif., which provides artists and organizations with infrastructure and administrative resources to support their growth and success. Henningsen is also the producing director of the nationally-recognized Speakeasy Society, which has created over 35 original immersive productions across Los Angeles and worked nationally with Meow Wolf, Disney Imagineering and Impact Museums. In 2023, he received the distinguished alumni award from the California Institute of the Arts for his work cultivating emerging artists.

Biggest accomplishment since departing TS? Making a living in the arts. Growing up in Salina, the chances of making a living doing the arts full time was a long shot. When I started high school my plan was to take over the family farm. I never thought I would own a theater complex in Los Angeles. To all of those kids out there who love theater, it IS possible.

they now?

Ethan Badders

Salina tie: 2017 Salina Central High School graduate; 2021 Kansas Wesleyan University graduate

Years at TS: 2016-22

Best memory from time at TS: My favorite was when I did "Tuck Everlasting" and Nathan Tysen came

in. Some of my best friends were in the cast. We met Nathan Tysen. I got to work with Kate Lindsay (Salina South High School drama teacher); I never got to work with her before.

What has stayed with you from TS?: A big thing that was taught at Theatre Salina is to have a good time. I feel like everyone always had a smile on their face, was happy to see each other. I like the family environment they fostered. I tried to take that into my professional world in building relationships. Those soft skills have been helpful in the audition room, in the workspace.

What have you been doing since? In rehearsal for off-Broadway debut for "In Harmony" presented by BY Productions at the NYC Fringe Festival April 5, 8, 13 and 18. Before this, I've been blessed to go to Virginia, Colorado, Wyoming, Massachusetts, New Hampshire. I've been blessed to be in a bunch of shows, cabarets, amusement parks and theatres.

Biggest accomplishment since departing TS? I've been consistently booked as an actor. I have felt in the past a lot of people didn't think I could do it. The fact that I have been doing it and didn't stop is a good feeling.



Shelby Quackenbush

Salina tie: 2014 Salina Central High School graduate

Years at TS: 2010-18

Best memory from time at TS: When I look back at my years at SCT, I think of the camaraderie of the casts I had the honor of being a part of. SCT truly became my second home and gave me life long mentors and friends.

What has stayed with you from TS?: SCT taught me a plethora of skills that have led me to success in my professional career. I not only learned singing and acting and dance, but was taught how to be part of a team and a cast. I learned how to sew, build costumes, choreograph, teach, build sets, lighting, audio, stage manage, and so much more. Through this, I was instilled with the knowledge that every single person is so vital to the success of a production and no role is too small. I also learned that pursuing this as a career was possible through the many successful alumni of the theatre.

What have you been doing since? I accepted a full-time position at Epcot at Walt Disney World, where I helped produce the Disney on Broadway concert series, the Candlelight Processional starring celebrities such as Neil Patrick Harris and Chita Rivera. Following my career at Epcot

I transferred to the Magic Kingdom, where I've had the honor of stage managing shows at Cinderella Castle, park-wide events, nighttime spectaculars, and produced filmings for Good Morning America, the View and ABC.

Biggest accomplishment since departing TS? This question brings to mind many things I've worked on, but the truth is I get to live every day in the entertainment world bringing joy to others. Millions of people walk through our gates expecting to experience the happiest day of their life — getting a part of the team that brings those dreams to life is a dream come true in itself. I wake up with genuine excitement to go to work every day, and that is a future I would never have pursued if it weren't for the encouragement and preparation SCT gave to me.



Carrie Gilchrist

Salina tie: 1996 Salina South High School graduate

Years at TS: 1992-99

Best memory from time at TS: ? For me, it wasn't a specific thing. It was the feeling when you walk in the doors. A homecoming feeling. I remember being there as a kid, I wasn't treated as a child, I was treated as an equal. I love that the culture was cultivated at Theatre Salina.



What has stayed with you from TS?: The quality and variety of people that came in to teach there. They brought in people as a snapshot of what else was going on in the world. It felt like an open door to the rest of the world.

What have you been doing since? Working in the theatre directing professionally, writing musicals and serving as the full time Artistic and Executive Director of Lovewell Institute internationally.

Biggest accomplishment since departing TS? Connecting 5,000 plus students through Lovewell, helping to create 300 plus shows and helping to maintain a global community of artists.

Rupe repeats

Salina runner named Gatorade Kansas Girls' Cross Country Player of the Year – again

BY TERI L. HANSEN
The Magazine

Katelyn Rupe, 17, is no stranger to hard work. The Salina Central High School junior continues to reap the rewards of her efforts. During the 2022-23 school year, she was named Gatorade Kansas Girls' Cross Country Player of the Year, the first time an athlete was chosen from Salina Central High School.

Once again, she was granted the award for the 2023-24 school year.

"Simply, I just love running," she said.

It wasn't love at first run, and cross country didn't come into play until a little late in the game. Rupe began running in second grade with Salina Burn Track & Field.

"While I loved the practices, the running part was not my favorite," she explained.

She ran long distance, but didn't run cross country. In middle school she chose to play tennis rather than run, and then in her seventh grade year, COVID eliminated the track season.

"Because of COVID, I began running on the treadmill, up to 3 miles a day, because I was bored," she said. "My dad and I also began running together around this time, and then we decided we would run and train for a half-marathon together. This is what made my love of running grow a lot."

She then joined the Salina Burn group for seventh to 12th graders right before her freshman year of high school.

"This reinforced my love for running because I was around others who loved it too, and I have been running with the group, coached by Huey Counts, ever since, and credit so much of my success to it," she said. "I also love running because of some of the super-cool opportunities that it has given me."

Rupe's athletic achievements are vast and have given her some of those cool opportunities she talks about. She won her second straight Class 5A state meet title in November with a time of 17:36.20. She took second place at the Nike Cross Heartland Regional, which made her Kansas' top prep girl in the race. She finished 28th at the NXN Final and is ranked No. 40 nationally for the 2023 MileSplit50. She beat her own personal record at the 2023 Bob Schmoekel XC Invitational and clocked 17:05.90. As she prepares for her senior year, her career race record is 14-3, with her only losses coming from regional and national meets.

"I got to meet and see a lot of pro runners, including getting to talk to Emily Venters. She ran at Lawrence Free State and then did amazing in college and is now a professional runner," Rupe said. "She was so amazing to talk to and so



Katelyn Rupe competes in a cross country meet during fall 2023.

cool that someone, a Kansas runner, was now a professional runner and that I was able to talk to her.”

In order to win the Gatorade award, the nominee must show excellence as not only an athlete, but a student as well, with academic achievements and exemplary character distinguishing them from the crowd. The Gatorade Player of the Year program annually recognizes one winner in the District of Columbia and each of the 50 states that sanction high school football, girls’ volleyball, boys’ and girls’ cross country, boys’ and girls’ basketball, boys’ and girls’ soccer, baseball, softball, boys’ and girls’ track and field and awards one National Player of the Year in each sport. The selection process is administered by the Gatorade Player of the Year Selection Committee.

“I am so happy that I won the Kansas Cross Country Gatorade Player of the Year,” Rupe said. “It is such a cool award, and looking at the past winners, I feel so lucky to have won the same award as them. It was also such a good cap to my season.”

“Katelyn is an incredibly driven and gifted athlete. She works very hard in the classroom, and she manages her time exceptionally well,” Coach Brad Dix said.

Dix has coached Rupe for two years.

“She is also a very grounded athlete who gets as excited about new and challenging workouts as she does for competition,” he said. “Her parents have instilled in her a love of running, and it’s evident that she truly loves what she does.”

Her success comes after only two years, as she didn’t run cross country her freshman year in favor of playing tennis. In two seasons of tennis, Rupe’s record was 50-23, and in both years she



Courtesy photos

Katelyn Rupe, left, with her parents Abbey and Chris Rupe and brother Colin. This is the second consecutive year Katelyn was named Gatorade Kansas Girls’ Cross Country Player of the Year.

qualified for state. She won seventh place in singles her freshman year. Rupe opted to play tennis rather than run that first year due to district rules stating she could not participate in both sports. Though initially a disappointment, Rupe has since changed her tune after being a dual athlete her sophomore year after the rule was changed. For her junior year, she decided to focus her athletic efforts on cross country.

“I love both sports and I love being able to do both,” Rupe said. “It was one of the hardest decisions I think I’ve made ever. I just love both so much.”

She credits her tennis coach Jase West with some of her success in running as well. From playing in 100-degree heat to early morning practices, her coach made her tough inside and out.

“He helped me develop my mental toughness into what it is today,” Rupe said. “This all built my mental strength. Tennis, same as distance running, is also a very mentally taxing sport. His reinforcement of having mental

toughness, despite being tired, helps me still today, and keeps me engaged late in a race when all I want to do is stop. Even though I don’t play tennis anymore, what he taught me has stayed with me.”

It takes more than athleticism to be named by Gatorade, and not only does Rupe have a 4.00 GPA, she is known as a giver in the community. She attended the Hugh O’Brian Youth Leadership 4-day seminar last summer. She’s an active member of her First Presbyterian Church youth group. She participates in HOSA, a student-led organization that promotes career opportunities in the health care industry. She has also donated her time as a youth coach for the Salina Burn track club.

“She’s hard-working, self-motivated and humble,” Rupe’s mother, Abbey Rupe, said about her daughter. “She’s a leader, role model and good student.”

Katelyn Rupe comes from a high-achieving family and is the oldest child of Chris and Abbey Rupe. They also have a son, Colin, who is a

freshman. Abbey Rupe is a pediatrician and Chris Rupe is a general surgeon.

Running may very well be in the blood for Katelyn. Marathons are a common pastime for her parents and even her grandparents.

Katelyn’s grandmother is a runner and runs half-marathons each year. Chris Rupe recently completed his 20th marathon and has started running ultras.

“While I don’t have the athletic success that Katelyn has, sports have always been a part of my life,” Abbey Rupe said. “I played volleyball, basketball and track in high school. After medical school and residency, I started running again and found some success there. I’ve run quite a few half-marathons and three full marathons, including qualifying for and running the Boston Marathon.”

The Salina Burn is where Katelyn’s track career began. She runs for their winter team, the Winter Soldiers, in addition to her coaching. Along with training with her team, she also trains on her

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RUNNING

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own as well. She runs six days a week and gives herself one day of rest. She averages about 40-45 miles per week and also does three days of strength training.

"Huey Counts, my off-season coach at Salina Burn, has helped me so much and made me a faster runner," Rupe said. "He devotes so much of his time and energy and I am so incredibly thankful for him."

Rupe's high school coach has also played a role in her success. He began coaching track Rupe's sophomore year and has been her cross country coach all along.

"He makes practices super fun with his dancing and playing music and just overall attitude," she said. "He always has a quote of the day, and at practice he talks about what the quote means, which with a sport as mentally taxing as distance running is, the quote always puts things into perspective or motivates us before a workout."

"Coaching Katelyn is fairly easy in one sense because she could probably program her own workouts and be successful, but I really enjoy having those conversations with her," Dix said.

He has been head coach at Central for seven years and prior to that coached at Sacred Heart for 13 years.

"Coaching distance run-

ners is always a team effort to make sure they are getting the right mix to perform at their best while also staying healthy," Dix said. "She is highly invested in her training and she has made me a better coach. The truth of the matter is that my most important job at this point is to make sure she gets to the starting line on time."

Rupe's first year running cross country, she gained a name for herself when she led the pack in just about every race. She won every race and then took the 5A state title and was the only state qualifier for Salina Central. Then she went on to have a second season filled with as much success as the first, though this time she had teammate Kaylie Shultz with her at state. Shultz, a freshman, came in 23 seconds after Rupe at the state meet, taking second place.

"Not long after I crossed the finish line, I knew my teammate was in second," Rupe said. "That made it even more exciting because we were able to accomplish our goal of going one, two at state. It's just so fun to get to line up next to her. It's kind of like I'm running for something more, too, because I know that she's there to push me. I know I have someone close behind me and I'll hear people cheering her name closely after mine in races."

Shultz has finished second

behind Rupe in every race for the season. This was no surprise as the two train together in the off-season at Salina Burn.

With the girls being so close, there's the question of what will happen if Shultz emerges with a first-place victory over Rupe someday? Humble to the end, Rupe will be happy to see her friend succeed.

"I also repeated as state champion, but this time, my teammate, Kaylie Shultz, got second, which was so exciting and also made the whole experience so much fun," she said.

The Gatorade award doesn't only come with bragging rights. Rupe also received \$1,000 to donate to an organization of her choice. She chose to donate the money to the Salina School Marathon Foundation, a nonprofit that hosts a school-wide marathon for elementary school students.

"Katelyn is not only a

great competitor and a talented runner, but she continues to give back to her community as well," Dix said.

While a third state win is a wonderful goal to have, that's not Rupe's immediate focus. For now, her eyes are focused on the track and field season. It will come as no surprise that she has won Class 5A state titles in the 1,600- and 3,200-meter runs. The spring will bring with it new opportunities.

"One of the best parts of coaching Katelyn is having a great seat to watch her compete," Dix said. "When you see how hard she works every day in-season and off-season, it's so nice to see that hard work pay off with state title recognition, back-to-back Gatorade Girls' Cross Country Player of the Year awards, NXR and NXN appearances, etc."

"I've had the opportunity to coach some very talented runners, and she is one of the best competitors to ever toe the line."



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Three decades of theatre



Scott and Vicki Price perform in "Singin' In The Rain" in 2016.

KAREN BONAR/The Magazine

Price family performs in 53 plays since 1993

BY KAREN BONAR
The Magazine

Above the fireplace in Scott and Vicki Price's home hangs a simple sign, "Tengo Famiglia."

The sign, which in Italian means "I have family," is a nod to the couple's performance in the 2022 Theatre Salina production of "Over the River and Through the Woods."

But for Scott and Vicki, it means so much more.

Every year since 1993, at least one member of the family has performed on the main stage at Theatre Salina. Several notable times, the entire family, including Andrea Price, David Price and Megan Coberly, have all graced the stage together. In all, the

family has appeared in 53 Theatre Salina mainstage productions over more than three decades.

"I wanted to have fun with my family," Vicki said. "Then you find all those gifts within that. Gifts from the family. Gifts in the community. Getting to know people. Getting to spend your life with them."

"There's nothing better than when we connect with each other. That's what life is about."

"Also, there is real power in doing these shows with family," Scott added. "You know they're going to be supportive of you. It gives you more confidence."

Scott and Vicki are high school sweethearts from Colorado. Vicki was involved in the drama club and Scott was heavily

involved in music during high school. They shared one on-stage experience in the musical "Camelot." Upon high school graduation, the duo didn't step into the spotlight for more than two decades.

"Andrea, our oldest, loves to be in shows," Vicki said. "She wanted to take classes. They had classes, so I signed her up for classes when she was 7 or 8 years old. Then David followed suit. He wanted to take classes too."

David, who as an adult has worked for more than 14 years in performance for luxury cruise lines, utilizes a song from "A Chorus Line" to explain his entrance to theatre.

"(Mike) would watch his older sister go to dance lessons. He would go 'I can do that,'" David said. "When

Andrea first started taking dance lessons, mom would bring me to classes because we didn't have a babysitter. I was 5 years old watching Andrea take tap, jazz and ballet.

"When your older sister is your idol, you want to do that, too. That's how I got into it."

The family's foray into main stage performance began in 1993 when Andrea auditioned for "The Best Christmas Pageant Ever."

"I took Andrea to audition," Vicki said. "I had David with me because I had to take him to a ball game. We're sitting in the back, the kids are auditioning and the directors said, 'Is there anybody else, would you like to audition?' (David) goes up to audition and reads and gets Charlie,

one of the leads.”

In the early '90s, Theatre Salina (then known as Salina Community Theatre) had a policy that performers must be in fourth grade and have taken at least one class to participate on the main stage. Vicki said the family teased Andrea, who had been taking classes for several years, because David fit neither criterion.

“David was too young and hadn't taken a class,” Vicki said.

“David got the biggest part he could get. I was 12 and I was mad,” Andrea said.

Yet, her fondest memories from childhood are from the stage.

“David and I were in a show together every summer. It was an all-day thing,” Andrea said. “It was one of the best parts of my childhood. It was so fun.”

In 1994, both Andrea and David were in “Little Women.” Then, in 1995, Scott was cast in “Jesus Christ Superstar.”

“That was one of the most powerful (shows) I was ever in,” he said. “The town took to it amazingly. Every single performance was sold out. I was just one of the disciples. I wasn't a lead or anything. It was a fantastic show and it was something I'd been missing and didn't even know I was missing it.”

In 1995, youngest child, Megan, joined family members on stage for the production of “Oliver!” By then, the theatre dropped its prerequisites for main stage performers.

“Scott had done a show or two by then. Megan was in second grade at ‘Oliver!’ time. Megan wanted to do anything her big brother and sister did,” Vicki said. “I thought, ‘If I'm driving them down there all the time, I'll audition.’”

“It's always been organic. It wasn't a goal to have all five of us in (a show). It was the stars aligning.”

David Price

2003 Salina South High School Graduate

The family developed rituals during rehearsals and performances. After rehearsals, David said they would eat clementines or nectarines.

“I remember during ‘Oliver!’ when I was 12, we would have ice cream when we came home,” he said. “It felt good on our throats. Those were long rehearsals.”

“Oliver!” was Vicki's first main stage performance.

“I hadn't been in a show (since high school) and I was 45 years old,” she said. “I was not theatre savvy at that time.”

David, who was 12 at the time, was the leading role.

“I remember the first time we were together for a scene, I stood there (backstage) for a moment,” Vicki said. “David was right there with me and said, ‘This is our ladder mom.’ It may not sound like a big deal, but it still makes me teary. There was my 12-year-old son who had been in more shows than I had (in Salina) and he was like, ‘This will be fine mom.’ He was right.”

“When you raise a child and they are at a time in their life when I'm not the leader, the kid is the leader, that's a precious moment in your life. You've gotten them to this place where they are smart and strong and confident and can help you.”

Being present during rehearsals and performances offered Scott and Vicki a different perspective of their children.

“In the theatre, you show what kind of person you are,” Vicki said. “You work late. It's hard. There's drama.”

“Younger kids in the cast who would look up to them

and would talk to them about ‘my dog died.’ I would watch them stop and listen to that younger person in a cast. That almost made me happier than the fact they could sing or dance beautifully. I could see that firsthand, what kind of person my kid is. If I wasn't in the show, I wouldn't have seen all of those things.”

“Oliver!” was also the first time Megan Coberly, the youngest of the Price children, was in a main stage show.

“They were doing it, so I wanted to do it,” she said. “I was in my first show when I was 8. I fell in love with the whole process of it. Even though I was only 8, I fell in love with the smell of the stage. I didn't fall in love with just performing, I fell in love with the process.”

The entire family has performed together onstage twice: in the 2001 production of “Big River” and in the 2003 production of “Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat.”

“It's always been organic,” David said. “It wasn't a goal to have all five of us in. It was the stars aligning. (It would happen before) Andrea went to college or she was back for summer.”

“It happened to have something for everybody and we all auditioned.”

Being in a production with family members has its perks.

“When you are in a musical, you're going around the house singing the songs,” Vicki said. “Thank God for Megan and David. They would help us learn the cho-

reography. We did not grow up as dancers. Megan would show us in the basement.”

“I have really fun memories of doing shows with David,” Megan said. “In ‘Peter Pan’ we had the most fun. I was a lost boy, he was a pirate. It was so successful, we kept adding shows.”

Her favorite stage memory is from the 1998 production of “Annie” when she was 10 years old.

“That group of orphans was so stacked. It was an honor to be in that (ensemble),” Megan said. “We had Emily Afton — she was Pepper — she was older and I was 10. I idolized her in everything she did.”

“That was my first experience with Michael Spicer. He always said, ‘That group was something special.’”

In 2012, David was cast as Ren in “Footloose.” He was on vacation from working professionally on cruise ships when he was cast for the role.

“That was fun for me because I started at this theatre as a kid and you're looking up at everyone,” he said. “To come back at 28 and be able to be the lead and have all these kids look up to me ... it was full circle. I felt a sense of pride coming back and feeling like I was giving back to what was given to me.”

The role also proved to be the most challenging one at Theatre Salina.

“It was some of the hardest acting because you can't not be cognizant that you're acting with your father. I didn't have the capacity to do that,” David said.

David was cast as Ren McCormack and Scott as Rev. Shaw Moore. When David's character started dating the preacher's daughter, conflict naturally fol-

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lowed.

"We had a couple of very dramatic scenes where we had to have a lot of tension. We had never had to do anything like that before," David said. "It was difficult because we have such a good relationship. We have never had much conflict. That was the hardest acting — to act like I had it in for my dad. It was hard to fight 28 years of how this man raised me and really go at him."

While their children took acting classes, Scott and Vicki learned by performing.

"A lot of it was keeping at it," Scott said. "The more shows you're in, the more you learn. We learned a lot from having really, really good directors."

Scott and Vicki will celebrate their 52nd wedding anniversary in June. Often, but not always, they perform the role of a married couple.

"It's really, really fun because for one thing, you can bring parts of your own relationship to the stage," Scott said. "It adds extra depth if we are married in a show. We've been lucky to be that quite a few times."

"We certainly didn't have any problem at all with stage kisses."

Vicki said the 2010 performance of "All Shook Up" involved a prolonged kiss.

"We had this huge kiss," she said. "Every night (the kiss would) get longer and longer."

With more than three decades at the same theatre, they have had the opportunity to be in the same show more than once.

Vicki was in "Steel Magnolias" in 2009 and 2021. The couple was in "Annie" in 2008 (with David and Megan) and 2017 and "White Christmas" in 2011 and 2021. Scott performed the same role in "1776 The Musical" twice, in 2000 and 2019. Both times he was cast as Secretary Charles Thomson.

"It was fun to revisit that part after almost 20 years," Scott said. "I felt a lot more confident. The first time we did it, it was only my fourth or fifth show."

"I had so many shows in between, I went into it with a lot more confidence, which makes it more fun when you feel confident about what you're doing."

Scott and Vicki's children are grown and gone, but the couple remains active in Theatre Salina productions. In 2021, they were in "White Christmas." In 2022, the couple was in three productions together: "Over The River And Through the Woods," "Glorious!" and "Into the Breeches."

They will appear in the upcoming production of "Sense and Sensibility" from April 5-21.

The love for performing continued into adulthood for the Price children.

Andrea, who has been a teacher for 18 years, has been in charge of the drama program at Arkansas City High School for a dozen years.

"It's what I do with my life now. I love that," she



The Price family performed together in "Big River" in 2001. From left are Vicki, David, Megan, Scott and Andrea.

Courtesy photo

as a singer/dancer and later as a musician."

Upon graduation,

his manager suggested he explore the option of performing on a cruise ship. He began in 2009 as a drummer.

"During that contract, the music director took me under his wing. He told me, 'With your performance background, you should be a music director on ships.'" David said. "I was planning on being a couple years at sea. I have just finished my 14th year."

Most recently, he worked as a music or entertainment manager, then as cruise director on luxury cruise ships.

"In all of those gigs, whether I'm music or entertainment manager, I still rely on stuff I leaned at the theatre," he said. "I rely on the work ethic I got when I was a kid."

Andrea said the theatre is a remarkable place where her family could be involved across a myriad of ages.

"What other activities are there that you can do with your whole family? You can't all play on the same softball team," she said. "I feel really grateful the theatre was a place we could be together. It's what we love to do."

"It was a place my family and I could get closer together and grow individually and artistically."

said.

"Being in shows was the best part of my childhood and high school experience. I get to give that to kids now. I wish that we had something here like Theatre Salina."

Megan returned to Theatre Salina as its education director from 2018-22. She and her husband, Chaz, are currently living in New York City, where Chaz is completing his master's in theatre management and producing at Columbia University in NYC.

The foundation provided at Theatre Salina was invaluable for David.

"Starting at a place when I was so young, I learned so much," David said. "I think one of the things I appreciated is since it was a community theatre, you did all of the stuff yourself. You were hanging up your own costumes."

During college when David was working toward a degree in music education, he performed at Worlds of Fun in Kansas City.

"I learned a lot of important skills (in Salina). When I got my first professional gig in K.C., I leaned on what I learned as a young kid in the theatre," he said. "It really helped me

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Lovewell ties run deep in Salina

BY KAREN BONAR
The Magazine

In 1989, a workshop that eventually morphed into the Lovewell Institute began on stage at Salina Central High School.

"The program started there to bring students together to write a musical in three weeks," said Carrie Gilchrist, Lovewell's artistic and executive director. "It was one workshop a year in Salina. A load of us in the Lovewell community grew up in Salina. We went back to work as we got older."

Since its inception, the program, which is now based in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., has reached more than 5,000 students, Gilchrist said.

"Eventually, it became a business and grant decision to move it out of Salina," she said.

Lovewell was incorporated as a not-for-profit organization in 1989.

"We've gone from one workshop in Salina to 25 to 30 a year and we've written over 300 shows with the organization," Gilchrist said. "We've started cultural exchange programs in Italy and Sweden. It all started in Salina."

Although the program's headquarters are no longer in Kansas, ties continue to bind former participants, but also help forge new relationships.

The program brings

LOVEWELL DATES:

- June 3-7 in Hays (residential) \$250
- June 10-14 in Concordia (\$50)
- June 17-21 in Phillipsburg (\$50)

together high school students for a week and those students create a production from the ground up: script, lyrics, music, costumes.

In 2018, the Lovewell Institute returned to Kansas with the help of the Dane G. Hansen Foundation, based in Logan.

In 2023, three sites were available in Kansas: Hays, Phillipsburg and Concordia.

"I fell in love with the program," said Melissa Swenson, director of the Brown Grand Opera House in Concordia. "When I first did love Lovewell in 2021 and saw the process unfold ... the kids really do put it all together. Nobody was saying 'You can't do that.'"

"It was total acceptance of 'What would that look like?' It was amazing to see it all unfold with the Lovewell staff."

Each year the experience is different.

"We have kids come back and do it year after year," Swenson said. "It is totally different plot and choreography. They learn it all and do it all in five days. It's amazing. I'm glad the



Hollis Murdock (playing Princess Margaret) dips Avery (playing Wren the Conspiracy Theorist) in rehearsal for the final scene of the 2023 Hays Lovewell performance.

Courtesy photo by Julian Weslander

Brown Grand gets to be a part of it. We have about 80-100 people who come to the show. The community has gotten to know what Lovewell is. They support the kids in the show."

Gabriel Freeland, sophomore at Salina Central High School, attended the program in Hays.

"I wanted it to help me improve my theatre and singing skills," Freeland said.

Gaining new skills was a goal, but his experience was broader.

"The social aspect was my favorite," he said. "Everyone was amazing. The teachers and directors were very helpful when we were writing the story."

The group in Hays crafted and produced a play called "Heresy! A Melodic Medieval Adventure."

"It has helped me improve," Freeland said of the improvisational skills he

learned during the 2023 workshop. "If I mess up on stage during a performance, my improv skills help me. I think about, 'What's the scene, what's the character, what's the mood' if I don't remember my line."

Hollis Murdock, a freshman at Salina South High School also attended the Hays experience, which is considered immersive because the students live on campus during the camp.

"I had never gone to Lovewell or anything similar before, and I thought it would be a fun opportunity to expand my theatre education," she said. "I learned how important it is to not shy away from opportunities to do things that I love."

Gilchrist said she is grateful for the partnership with the Hansen foundation.

"They are providing arts education; some students wouldn't have access to arts education otherwise," she said. "It creates a cultural

bridge. It's an amazing program to have for Northwest Kansas.

"In other parts of the world, it could cost \$1,000."

She is grateful scholarships are available to students who live within the borders the Hansen Foundation serves. Day camps cost \$50 for the week, and the residential program in Hays has an additional \$200 cost for room and board for the week. Participation is limited to 20 students per week.

Lovewell began on stage at Salina Central High School was moved to Theatre Salina from 1991-95. In 1996 and 1997, the program was held at Kansas Wesleyan University before it was relocated to its current headquarters in Florida.

Betsy Wearing, coordinator of programs, communications and new initiatives for the Hansen Foundation, said arts education is important.

"We recognize that there are some opportunities that are harder for our students to find in rural communities and schools. The Lovewell program has an excellent reputation and offers a truly unique experience," she said.

"Since we have brought Lovewell back to Kansas, the students who have participated have responded positively, telling us that the experience has been meaningful, fun and sometimes transforming."

Wearing said since 2018, 234 students participated in Lovewell in seven different northwest Kansas communities.

"The quality of life they're gaining for their future is incredible," Swenson said of the Lovewell experience. "We're pleased to be one of those facilities that can develop their character and creativity for their future."

For more information or to apply, visit <https://lovewell.org/apply/workshop-dates-kansas/>.

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2022 invasion of Ukraine is still Close to home

BY TERI L. HANSEN
The Magazine

Growing up in Latvia, Olga Silverman did the same things any little girl does — she went to school, played with her friends, hung out with her cousins and visited her grandparents during the summers. Those summer days were spent in Ukraine, where both her maternal and paternal grandparents lived. Both her mother and father were born in western Ukraine.

“It is a very nationally proud place,” she explained.

It was during these visits that she learned to speak the language, heard the history and had the culture ingrained into her soul.

“I had a lot of national pride instilled into me by my grandparents,” she said. “My grandmother was a great patriot of the Ukraine.”

Ukraine was invaded by Russian troops on Feb. 24, 2022.

Silverman remembers the moment she learned of the events that were unfolding thousands of miles away geographically, but so near to her heart. She was a debate coach for Sacred Heart Jr./Sr. High School in Salina and sitting in a meeting when someone pulled out their phone and said, “Russia has just invaded Ukraine.”

“It absolutely broke my heart,” she said. “I had to take a moment and step

“I had a lot of national pride instilled into me by my grandparents. My grandmother was a great patriot of the Ukraine.”

Olga Silverman
Former Saline County
Resident

out and compose myself. There is not a day that passes that we don’t watch the news. I am very deeply invested in what is happening there.”

Silverman still has family in Ukraine. While most of her immediate family is not, she has aunts, uncles and cousins who are there.

“At first, I wanted to drop everything and go there,” she said. “That didn’t seem prudent. We donate money whenever we can. My mom remains in Latvia, one of the potential targets for Russian aggression.”

Today, when discussions of the conflict in Ukraine take place, it is of relatively recent events. The current tensions are said to stem from 2014. Before the 2022 invasion, Russian troops were stationed near Ukraine’s borders. This was done while Russian officials maintained they had no plans to attack and instead called it a “special military operation” in support of Russian-backed breakaway republics of Donetsk and



Courtesy photo

Olga Silverman and her husband, David, attend the International festival in Kansas City.

Luhansk. Paramilitary forces had been fighting Ukraine in the Donbas conflict since 2014.

On that fateful day in 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine for all the world to see, making it the largest attack on a European country since World War II according to “Ukraine and Russia,” a study printed at Cambridge University in

March 2023. The invasion caused an estimated tens of thousands of Ukrainian civilian casualties and hundreds of thousands of military casualties. By June 2022, Russian troops occupied about 20 percent of Ukrainian territory. About 8 million Ukrainians had been internally displaced and more than 8.2 million had fled the country by

April 2023, creating Europe's largest refugee crisis since the second world war.

Though a relatively new development to many, this conflict runs deeper and longer in Silverman's family. As a child, when her grandmother would tell her bedtime stories, they always seemed to end with the words, "And then the Bolsheviks came."

"She never called them Soviets," Silverman said.

The Bolsheviks, led by Vladimir Lenin, were a far-left faction of the Marxist Russian Social Democratic Labour Party which split with the Mensheviks at the Second Party Congress in 1903. The Bolshevik party seized power in Russia in the October Revolution of 1917, and was later renamed the Communist Party of the Soviet Union according to "A Concise History of the Russian Revolution" by Richard Pipes. This was long before tensions in 2014.

Silverman's grandfather and grandmother were arrested at one time. Her grandfather was a member of the resistance and was imprisoned for five years.

"My grandmother was arrested and investigated," Silverman explained. "They thought she may know where weapons were hidden and other sensitive information. She was said to have been beaten. My mother was only 13 months old at the time."

"We are all working for the victory," she recalls her family saying. "That's what we call it. This is very important to us."

In 2003, Silverman came to the United States. Though growing up she

"I understand how it feels that this war is so far away and that it doesn't feel important, but America is seen as the very beacon of democracy.

Of course America cannot take care of every war everywhere, but when we have this scale of aggression that is conducted by an aggressor that can potentially threaten the whole entire world, it is felt by people all over that America needs to step up."

Olga Silverman

Spent her childhood summers in Ukraine

was interested in teaching, she went on to achieve a master's degree in industrial engineering.

While working in communications, she met husband David online in some professional forums. In America, she has lived in Louisiana, Colorado, North Dakota, Missouri and Kansas. Though she is no longer living in Saline County, Silverman spent time teaching at Sacred Heart as well as in Solomon. Besides being a debate coach, she has taught English — impressive, as it is her fourth language. While there was a lot to get used to in America, some things were reminiscent of her summer haven.

"Geographically, Kansas is very similar to Ukraine," she said. "The weather and climate are very similar. There is a lot of corn and sunflowers. It's less flat in Ukraine though."

More than the look of the land, there is a certain feeling that isn't all that different from what she remembers.

"Peoples' spirit — that spirit of independence and the culture you see in small towns is the same in what they call villages, but that's not what you might think of here," she said. "Villages are really a community of people that is very tightly-

knit and it's a self-governed community."

Silverman recalls her grandmother telling stories about when she was a young woman. Music and theater in small towns were not unlike those in rural Kansas.

"People would work in the fields all day then go home and clean up and go out to a club — clubs were like community theaters — and try to express themselves in creative ways," Silverman said. "A lot of that went away with the shift of Soviet culture. A lot of national expression was nipped in the bud and the Soviet power was trying to replace it with some kind of ideologically-driven activity, which did not take root ever."

Another similarity between rural Kansas and rural Ukraine is religious devotion; communities bonded together by their love and loyalty to their congregations.

"Many villages have churches that exist through the donation of the people, including the village where my grandparents come from," Silverman said. "A church built on the donations of people, by people with a lot of community activity centered around church."

In America people go

about their lives. They have their worries and cares just like anyone else. In February, they were planning their Super Bowl and Valentine's Day activities while in a country almost 6,000 miles away, people were in the midst of the second anniversary of an invasion of a force they've been fighting for more than a century.

"I understand how it feels that this war is so far away and that it doesn't feel important," Silverman said, "but America is seen as the very beacon of democracy. Of course America cannot take care of every war everywhere, but when we have this scale of aggression that is conducted by an aggressor that can potentially threaten the whole entire world, it is felt by people all over that America needs to step up. War can literally come to your house. Russia is not some little country that started some little fight in their area. It is a big country with nuclear abilities."

Every day Silverman sees the similarities of the current climate to that of nearly 85 years ago when countries debated for years on whether to join the Second World War.

"While parallels with World War II are not perfect, we need to remember the historical examples," she explained. "We know that if an aggressor is allowed to do whatever they want, like Nazi Germany was allowed to do, we ended up in a world war and we cannot afford to do so. If we don't send money and help there now, there will be a day when we will have to send our children instead."

Community connections through theatre



The stage at Theatre Salina was one of the first where Nathan Tysen's "Tuck Everlasting" was performed following its closure on Broadway.

Photos by KAREN BONAR/The Magazine

Relationships extend beyond stage

BY KAREN BONAR
The Magazine

While producing a play, cast members create unique bonds during the experience. But the relationship doesn't end there. The cast and creative team also build a relationship with the community that lasts beyond the final curtain call.

"It's the fun part about being in a show — not just connecting with a cast, but connecting with an audience. Knowing what you are doing together as a team is evoking emotions in an audience member," said Vicki Price, whose family has performed in more than 50 plays at Theatre Salina over the course of three decades.

Erin Debold began her career with the arts at Theatre Salina as a child in 1996.

"Anyone can be a dancer, can be a

performer," she said. "Thinking about what community theatre is about — it's about community; there aren't any barriers to participate."

She pursued a career in performing before shifting to administrative roles. She is currently the Director of Annual Giving at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York City.

"The arts are essential. We live in a world that is pretty gray," she said. "I think in a world that is black, white and gray, the arts add color. It's something we need for our soul."

She said community and regional theatres are vital because "not everyone gets the opportunities to go to big institutions."

Carrie Gilchrist is the Artistic and Executive director of Lovewell Institute, which helps create and encourage artistic expression through theatre.

"With community theatre, the sto-

"The arts are essential. We live in a world that is pretty gray. I think in a world that is black, white and gray, the arts add color. It's something we need for our soul."

Erin Debold

Director of Annual Giving at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, New York City

ries that come to life onstage are talking about situations that maybe you haven't experienced before," she said. "You dive further into ideas about words from a stage and learn more about our past and our future."

She was involved at Theatre Salina from 1992-99, and is a 1996 graduate of Salina South High School.

"One of the coolest things for me is seeing many high school friends back on stage now with their families,"

“At 16 I wrote my very first song on the grounds of SCT as part of a summer workshop called Lovewell Institute for the Creative Arts. Standing onstage hearing my peers sing something I wrote was an unforgettable feeling. I have been chasing that feeling for over two decades now as a professional songwriter.”

Nathan Tysen
Broadway Lyricist

Gilchrist said. “It makes me so happy to see the Freeland family all onstage performing. That expansion in the sense of generations of families who have been there for such a long time.”

Onstage any given night is an array of individuals from a variety of walks of life.

“That’s the beauty of community theatre — none of these people are doing it professionally,” Emily Afton said. “They come together and make this happen.”

Afton, who Salina audiences will know as Emily Thompson, performed at Theatre Salina from 1994-2004 and again in 2009. She is currently in “Hadestown” on Broadway.

Most recently, audiences in Salina saw Simeon Rawls onstage at Theatre Salina as Lola in “Kinky Boots.”

“Theatre Salina is such as community love letter,” he said. “It’s all of the community coming together; coming together to create a really enjoyable experience for everyone.”

Nick Salem is a 2018 Salina South High School graduate who currently lives and works professionally in New York City.

“Every time I think about Salina, I think about how grateful I am to have been raised there,” he said. “They are so supportive of the arts community. It’s unique.

“They make art in Salina because they love it. I can’t say that’s true everywhere.”

Christina McQueen grew up in California and attended Kansas Wesleyan University. In addition to performing onstage at Theatre Salina, he had an internship with Jenn Morris in the costume shop.

“(Jenn) was teaching me how to



In 2018, Salina native Nathan Tysen returned to his hometown to work with the cast before the opening of “Tuck Everlasting.” Tysen wrote the lyrics for the musical.

sew,” he said. “I helped make my own costume for “Tuck Everlasting.” I helped make that yellow suit. Prior to that, I didn’t know much about sewing or putting my own clothes together. She taught me a lot about the process. I appreciate her so much for that.”

The relationship extends beyond the Salina experience, though. McQueen was in the cast of “Anastasia,” a traveling Broadway production.

“When people would tell me, ‘I’m going to come see you in Wichita,’ or when people came to Lawrence, that blew my mind,” he said. “It reminds me that I not only have incredible people in my life from California or New York. Even though I only spent four years there, I can’t forget about Kansas. You guys made me.”

Afton, who is currently working in her third Broadway production, said she still sees familiar faces, even though she is performing in New York.

“I’ve had so many people from Salina come to see my show,” she said. “I feel like the community that I made through the Salina theatre community is amazingly connected.”

Lyricist Nathan Tysen graduated from Salina South High School in 1995.

“If you tell me to imagine a theatre, I close my eyes and see SCT,” he said. “It was the place for many seminal creative moments.”

“At 16, I wrote my very first song on the grounds of SCT as part of a summer workshop called Lovewell Institute for the Creative Arts. Standing onstage hearing my peers sing something I wrote was an unforgettable feeling. I have been chasing

that feeling for over two decades now as a professional songwriter. I also am grateful to still feel connected to the SCT community and treasure the support and friendships that continue to this day.”

The connection is not only for those who create.

“We know as audience members, theatre creates more emotionally and healthy and sound members of the community,” Education Director for Center Theatre Arts at Theatre Salina Maggie Spicer Brown said. “It gives them the opportunity to see stories that reflect themselves or don’t reflect themselves. It tends to make them better members of the community. We’re mentally and more emotionally in tuned with their own needs.”

Price said a strong arts and theatre community reflects positive community values.

“Theatre fosters empathy, and especially community theatre is this sense of community pride and local pride,” she said. “Especially with Theatre Salina. It’s something the whole community can be proud of. It brings a level of culture and awareness and experience not many big towns get to see.

“You can see a movie anywhere and stream anything anywhere, but to see people in your community express incredible talent and come together to create works of huge passion and commitment just for the joy of doing it ... it’s one of the best things in the world that people decide to do — create beautiful art together. Not many art forms are as collaborative and community-building or foster a community of acceptance and empathy that live theatre does.”

Winter reminder of times past

Central Kansans awoke Dec. 22, 1989, to a temperature that was the envy of blast-freezer manufacturers. Previous mornings the mercury sunk as low as minus 16. Then whammo. As old timers used to say, somebody left the north door open before bedding down Thursday night, Dec. 21.

Friday dawned sunny and clear. There was not a breath of wind. That's because at minus 24 degrees, the wind was frozen. Solid. So was everything else, including the radial tires on the car I was to drive to work.

Miraculously, the engine eventually turned over, but not before chugging, sputtering and coughing up a long string of automotive expletives.

Underway at last after a 15-minute warm up, the car rumbled away from the curb on what felt like four flat tires. After



Gordon Fiedler Jr.

Opinion Writer

about two miles the rubber warmed enough for the wheels to feel roughly round.

I bring this up as a reminder. January's Arctic visit could have been much worse. My cheap outdoor thermometer is as accurate as a sundial in moonlight, so its readings should be taken only as suggestions.

When one morning the needle hovered between minus 10 and minus 20, I took that as a suggestion to shut the blinds and be thankful that, happily if not richly retired, I had no place to go that day.

Imagine life long ago when winter winds howled and snow drifted to the eaves and people

conducted their morning business in an outhouse a long sprint from the bedroom.

Imagine hauling in hand-split wood to cook breakfast and to keep children and infants sufficiently pliable then shooing them semi-thawed to school through the great white.

Imagine in the dim, frozen dawn climbing aboard a one-horse open sleigh to head to town or to perform some necessary farm chore.

No, I can't either. Nor do I want to. Those hardy, God-fearing souls were tougher back then, but I suspect even the most religious of them would have murdered their kin for central heating and indoor plumbing.

My grandmother, born in 1888 and who cooked the best meals and scrumptious pies on a huge, black cast iron gas-fired stove that she had to light with

matches, lived long enough to experience but never understand the marvel that was the microwave oven. She wouldn't go near the thing at first, but later learned to accept the mysterious technology.

She died before the cell phone era. I wonder if she would have embraced that as well.

So imagine a life without microwave ovens, electric appliances, forced-air furnaces, flushing toilets, robotic vacuums and climate controlled vehicles with heated seats and being wirelessly connected to the world 24-7.

Imagine an existence without all of that.

Imagine living like the Amish. How soft do we become before we turn into boneless meringue?

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