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Local pols, economy add realism to Annisquam Village Players' 'Annie'

By *Gail McCarthy*
Staff Writer

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The story of "Annie" is a timeless tale and the Annisquam Village Players production will be no different when it opens Tuesday.

"This show is so appropriate for where we are today with the economy," said Terry Sands, a co-director. "It took place during the Great Depression and there's so much of it that is totally relevant to what's going on today."

The Annisquam Village Players are noted for their spirited cast and signature personalization of elements throughout the productions, including the appearance of local politicians in every show.

The company's annual productions, always crowd pleasers, are anticipated as part of the summer calendar for many Cape Ann residents. The "Annie" cast features 60 adults and children, from mothers to judges to top executives, who step out of their daily lives into their musical roles. The songs will be familiar to many, featuring the popular "It's the Hard Knock Life," "Tomorrow" and "You're Never Fully Dressed Without a Smile."

"People assume 'Annie' is a kids show but it has some of the best adult roles in musical theater. The lines are very funny," Sands said. "This will be an uplifting show that will get people out of the recession mode and pulled into a night of levity and hope. Hope is one of the messages of this play."

The play opens in the era of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, a Democrat, who took office in 1933, having defeated incumbent Republican Herbert Hoover, who some blamed for the Depression.

An early scene features "We'd Like to Thank You Herbert Hoover" sung by a bunch of hobos. When Annie runs away from the orphanage, she comes upon these hobos, once very wealthy men accustomed to an entitled life with summer houses in the tropics, who now live under the bridges of New York. In the Annisquam Village Players' version of the song, the audience will hear more recent political names inserted into the lyrics.

"This sets up an overview for things to come," said Sands. "I think everyone can identify with the mood of the economy."

Co-director Mary Curtis said she strived to tell this classic tale in a tender and meaningful way.

"It's the story of a man who had everything money could buy — one of his lines is "The world was my oyster but where was my pearl? — and the little girl who all her life dreamed of finding her mother and father only to find out they died a long time before," she said. "In many ways, it's a love story; a man who finds in one little girl the one person that makes his life seem worthwhile, and a little girl who is offered a father and a home. It's quite a lovely story."

With local personalities in the cast, the show will prompt much laughter, as well as thought.

New to the cast are Gloucester's Jennifer-Lee Levitz and Gloucester's Rick Gadbois, known locally for his comedy as musician Hooglio Bastistos. Levitz debuts as Miss Hannigan, the orphanage supervisor while Gadbois will play Rooster, Miss Hannigan's brother.

Sands said one of his favorite scenes is when Miss Hannigan, Rooster and his girlfriend perform "Easy Street."

"This song is a show-stopper," he said.

The scene at the White House is a natural place to insert appearances by Mayor Carolyn Kirk, state Sen. Bruce E. Tarr and state Rep. Ann-Margaret Ferrante. Cape Ann's Fred Lovejoy plays FDR.

In a New York City scene with its own twist, the Statue of Liberty will lead a parade. In another twist, a local boy, Jared Gilman, will play the role of Annie's dog, Sandy.

Mike English, who plays Oliver "Daddy" Warbucks and is the father of two sons, has had a learning curve working with the young orphan girl, Julia Silveira of Beverly.

"But that was not a bad scenario because Daddy Warbucks doesn't know how to deal with girls either," said Sands. "In fact, Warbucks said 'I thought orphans were boys.'"

English has a busy Sunday ahead of him, first competing in Gloucester's second triathlon event. "After that I will shuffle my way over to final dress rehearsal," he said.

This production has a big dance number and a Christmas scene reminiscent of "The Nutcracker," with a few surprises. "The show has a little bit of something for everybody," said Sands.

The community theater group often becomes a family affair for about a dozen local families.

"We just love bringing the families in," said Sands. They include English's son Jared and Jacob, as well as Curtis' daughter, Deborah Michel, who plays a star-to-be who just arrives in New York City.

Other family cast includes Patrice Kelly and daughter Jackie Kelly, Seania McCarthy of Rockport and her son Aedan McCarthy, and July Sofia Gadbois, daughter of Rick Gadbois.

This year, more locals may be aware of the show because, for the first time ever, the Annisquam Village Players entered a float in the Horribles Parade and handed out 1,500 fliers. The float, which featured the orphans singing the hard-knock-life song, with their mops and their pails, won a first-place award.

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If you go

What: Annisquam Village Players presents the musical "Annie."

When: Aug. 10 to 15; Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday performances at 7:30 p.m.; and Friday, Saturday and Sunday performances at 8 p.m.

Where: Annisquam Village Hall at 34 Leonard St. off of Route 127 North in the Annisquam village of Gloucester.

How much: Tickets are \$15 general admission and \$30 for reserved seating. Order online at www.annisquamvillageplayers.org. Tickets available at door if not sold out.

The Cast Of Annie

Orphans: Molly Julia Mocerri, Kate Emily Frick, Tessie Molly Twombly, Pepper Tess Burnham, Carol Mom, Sally Abigail Twombly, July Sofia Gadbois, Duffy Taeghan Hagood, Annie Julia Silveira.

Miss Hannigan: Jennifer-Lee Levitz

Bundles McCloskey: John Moskal

Dog Catcher: Jared English

Sandy: Jared Gilman

Lt. Ward and starlet dance partner: David Cluett

Hooverites: Evy Stewart, Tom Mannle, Anne Mannle, Bob Blatchford, Jud Gale, Kari Gunn, Patrice Kelly, Aedan McCarthy

Hobo children: Devon Kelleher, Bella Tocantins, Jacob English, Jared English, Ted Moskal, Michael Silveira, Linden Adamson

Radio announcer and Ickes: Bob Blatchford

Grace Farrell: Ariel Sargent.

Servants: Drake Keith McCarthy, Cecille Caroline Godfrey, Annette Gracie Papp, Freda Devon Kelleher

Mrs. Greer: Evy Stewart

Mrs. Pugh: Jackie Kelly

Mrs. Kennedy and Starlet: Deborah Michel

Ms. Latour: Patrice Kelly

Men: David Cluett, Bob Blatchford, Asher Weiss, Mac McHugh, Charlie Sumner

Oliver "Daddy" Warbucks: Mike English

New York City chorus: Bob Blatchford, Caroline Godfrey, Patrice Kelly, Aedan McCarthy, Seania McCarthy, Mac McHugh, Deborah Michel, John Moskal, Gracie Papp, Evy Stewart, Charlie Sumner, Peter Von Lossnitzer

New York City children: Grace Boucher, Gillian Buckley, Denby Fortune, Claire Gendron, Eva Kelleher, Francesca Twombly, Lucy Twombly, Graeme Kelleher, Jared Gilman, Zachery Mocerri, Thad Sobotowski, Christopher Von Lossnitzer.

Opera singer: Pharrel Wener

School Master: Peter Von Lossnitzer

Statue Of Liberty and Lily St. Regis: Victoria Fortune

Rooster: Rick Gadbois

Bert Healy: Will Rousmaniere

Chauffeur, sound effects man, Fred McCracken, Wacky and Jimmy Johnson: Aedan McCarthy

Boylan sisters: Seania McCarthy, Deborah Michel, Patrice Kelly

President Roosevelt: Fred Lovejoy

Cabinet Morgenthau: Jud Gale

Wallace: Greg Neal

Perkins: Deirdre White

Howe: Dean Harrison

Hull: Tony Verga

Mrs. And Justice Brandeis: Mary Curtis, Terry Sands