

# Happy Birthday Port Summer Show!



Some believe the greatest lessons one can learn in life can be found on a stage. It is here that self esteem is discovered, or that camaraderie is built. It is here that a chance is given for a star to be born. And stars can be found in a variety of shapes and forms. They needn't be popular television actors/actresses, nor academy award winners. They can simply be a child who needed a chance to develop his or her own character, boost their self image, or merely to be a part of things.

And that's what the Port Summer Show is all about. It builds stars. Stars in the eyes of the community. Stars in the eyes of parents. Stars in the sense of "self." For ten years, hundreds of Port youngsters have been given an opportunity to grow and develop themselves emotionally, socially and artistically thanks to a summer production that stems a decade and with a tremendous amount of community support. The story goes back even further than a decade to the days when Ron and Pam Meadows (both Schreiber graduates) started a summer musical production for kids "because they had nothing to do in this town." The idea was embraced by all, and the Sousa Band Shell was the site of the first musicals produced in August by the married dynamic duo, he: as producer, and she as director. For 15 years, the amateur summer musicals were co-produced by the Port Play Troupe with funds raised in the community, starting with *Anything Goes*, *Bye, Bye Birdie*, *Guys 'n Dolls*, and *Red, Hot & Blue*. Students continued to look forward to each summer musical, mainly because "it gave them something constructive to do and kept up the camaraderie that is missed when school lets out," says Nick Mastrocinque, an early veteran of the show. Brian Hiller, now in his thirties, says that the summer musical experience enabled him to have a chance to play leading roles when he went to college. And several of the theatre's alumni are now professionals, including Robert Fieldsteel, star of several early shows who worked for years with John Cassavetes and Gina Rolands before Cassavete's death. Fieldsteel has also appeared in television over the years.

But all good things must come to an end, and Pam and Ron decided to "retire" as producers after "major burn out." THE SHOW MUST GO ON! They say. And enter a group of parents to save the day, take control and establish a permanent summer musical, which in 1987 became known as **The Port Summer Show**.

Port resident Karen Osterman Keegan, who at the time was a member of the school board, recalls the first meeting at her home. "Ron and Pam Meadows had announced that they would no longer be able to organize the Port Summer Show and we all thought that it would be an awful loss for our teenagers and for the community as a whole. Ron and Pam had done a great job for so many years and the summer theater was an activity that the kids threw themselves into heart and soul. Not only did they love it, but they produced some really great theatre. I spoke to Bess Mulvihill and Pat Blumlein about it and she agreed that there were a lot of people in the community who would be willing to volunteer their services to continue this effort." As a board member, Karen encouraged the district to change its emphasis from continuing education for adults to community education with an expanded role in providing enrichment programs for children. There was support for that position and the district agreed to provide space and some financial support to help the new organization get its feet on the ground. "The rest is history."

The group quickly set in motion, soliciting support from Bob Harding (Realtor), the Port Youth Council (they became a subsidiary of the group), hiring directors and putting together their first show, *Barnum*. And every year since, a group of extremely committed community residents has come together to make what the Meadows' started "a continuing and exciting reality for our kids and their audiences. To me, that's what community is all about," says Blumlein, who, like Mulvihill, served as presidents of the show. Blumlein adds, "the show has been an important outlet to allow children to have a rewarding theatrical experience by participating in all angles of productions, both on and off stage. Our kids had such a wonderful experiencing mixing with the different age levels and learned responsible and camaraderie."

Exec. Director Port Youth Council Regina Farinaccio adds, "It is the ONLY supervised summer activities for teens, as well as a wonderful outlet for students who have even the slightest interest in theater. It is truly productive and worthwhile."

"Funding, however, has recently been a major problem. With the implementation of the Teen Center at the Landmark on Main Street nearly two years ago, massive fundraising efforts have been needed to keep the Youth Council programs going. "The Youth Council recognizes the importance of the continuation of the Summer Show, but it has been increasingly difficult to come up with funding year after year. We hope the community will support us financially," Farinaccio says.

In the past two years, additional support has been solicited from the Port Washington Police Benevolent Association, Marine Midland Bank, and most recently - Varsity Coach, the new transportation carrier for the Port Washington School District. Varsity contributed \$500 in recognition of the 10th anniversary of the show.

And speaking of anniversaries... *The Port Summer Show* will be producing the musical, **REDHEAD**, on **August 7-10** on Schreiber stage. The community is invited and encouraged to support the show by attending one of four performances (8pm Thursday - Sunday). Tickets are \$5, except on the first night of the show when all senior citizens and people who have RED HAIR are admitted free! The show is being directed by Mardi Braun and Cam Gelb, with music direction from Phil Glover. Andrea Martone is the current President of the Port Summer Show, and Fran Foster is Vice-President. Past Presidents of the show include: (the late) Dennis McCullough, Pat Blumlein, Bess Mulvihill and Chris Burwell.



The Port Summer Show's first musical, *Barnum*, in 1987



Everyone Loves A REDHEAD! 1997 Cast of Port Summer Show poses at rehearsal on Schreiber's stage.



Francine DiStefano & Deborah Rosenthal in 1972's *Anything Goes*, held at the Summer Band Shell in the pre-Port Summer Show days when it was known simply as a teen summer theater directed and produced by Ron & Pam Meadows.



The Port Summer Show is now permanently housed on Schreiber's Stage and continues to attract nearly a hundred youngsters in grades 7-12 who participate in the show both on and off stage.