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Behind the scenes at 'Plaza Suite'
Waynesboro Players prepares for first play of new season
By **GINA FARTHING**



Several actors came to auditions to read for parts in the upcoming Waynesboro Players play "Plaza Suite." In front are Director Sandi Belcher, left, and Assistant Director Sarah Fauber. Around the table starting at left are Justino Palacios, Lloyd Dollins, Fonda Gardner, Jennifer Parr, Den Frumen, Amy Barden, Janie Ballurio, Gary Flavin and Jami Lea Cook.

When the curtain opens on a new production, the audience is all eyes and ears. They are watching weeks or months of work come together, in a single moment, to entertain them. The actors make it look easy, as if they were born to be there.

But what goes into making a theater production? Does anyone in the audience think about that?

The Waynesboro Players recently held auditions for the first play of its new season, "Plaza Suite," by Neil Simon. It will be performed at 8 p.m. Nov. 3-5 at the Waynesboro High School auditorium.

According to Sandi Belcher, the play's director, several actors auditioned for parts. Auditioning is not as simple as merely reading from a script. The scene has to be set so actors can get a feel for what they will be reading. It can take hours to get through the line of applicants for a part.

But once all the characters have been selected, rehearsals can begin. Then begins another phase of production - set construction.

The Waynesboro Players have developed a modular set design that enables easier assembly and mobility



Jim Hall, left, and Clifford Cempe work on setting up the bedroom window.

of its interchangeable pieces, said Charlie Lawson, a member of the theater group. Since most productions are performed at the Waynesboro High School auditorium, the Players ? warehouse? on East Main Street - where set construction occurs - is set up to the dimensions of the auditorium.

Lawson says that all scripts come with basic set designs. The director must decide which parts can or cannot be used. Modifications are often made.

Modular sections are placed together - the walls, windows, doors and props. After the set is completed, each piece is marked and coded. The modules, constructed of wooden 2- by-4s and drywall, are replaced every 10 years or so, Lawson said. Rehearsals take place within the set.

?This shows us where the set needs tweaking,? Lawson said. ?Like a window that doesn?t shut or a door that needs a chain.?

After a set is built, the set-realization crew performs next. For ? Plaza Suite,? it is Dana Durham and her crew. Sarah Fauber, the assistant director, will coordinate the style and color of the set. Durham and her people will prime and paint the pieces.

About a week before the play goes before the public, set pieces are taken apart and moved to the high school for reassembly.



Charlie Lawson, right, holds a wall, while Hall drills in a window.

On the auditorium stage, the setup crew fits the pieces like a huge jigsaw puzzle. Then crew members perform light checks, sound checks and any special effects preparation. Rehearsals move

along, until the week before the presentation to the public, then pick up a frantic pace, including the introduction of dress rehearsals. Clifford Cempe has been working on set construction for 30 years. He started out with his wife and children. ?We just loved it,? he said.

?Oh, I never wanted to get on stage, but, backstage. I love it.? Cempe said he worked on a play years ago that had 17 scene changes.

?The key is to keep it simple,? he said. ?We had scenes that rotated. The audience loved it. They had to use their imaginations.? It is a process that begins anew on the next stage production.

As for that process, Cempe said, ?We fill the same holes, otherwise we get Swiss cheese.?

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