

Theatre Guild to move outdoors



Theatre Guild board members Andra Kauffeldt and David Rattle flank president Kevin Newman as they check records establishing the Guild's background.

By Tony Pearson

After a not-very-pleasant split with the Hospice-managed Bancroft Village Playhouse ? its home for over two decades ? the Bancroft Theatre Guild has a new plan for staging its 24 hour theatre this summer. They're taking to the Park. Just like companies in Toronto perform in High Park, and New York companies perform in Central Park, the Guild will mount the plays in Millennium Park ? hopefully, on the bandshell stage. Club 580 will be the back-up venue in case of rain, as well as serving as the locale where the plays will be written the night before they're performed.

This year, the plays will be staged free of charge; audience members may make a donation to the Food Bank or Community Trust if they desire.

Theatre Guild president Kevin Newman noted that the community-based amateur company was over a century old, having first performed in 1909, shortly after the Wright Brothers invented powered flight. "We've had many, many productions at many different places. We had thought that when the Guild created the Playhouse in the 1990s, we had found our forever home. We were wrong." He thanked the community for its "outpouring of support" during the current troubles.

Still, Newman insisted, the Guild was moving forward in a positive and fun way. "There's been talk of boycotting the Playhouse, or even staging a demonstration. We don't want anything to do with that, and hope it doesn't happen. We don't want to blame Hospice. They'll do their thing and we'll do ours. We won't be drawn into a conflict."

There are issues yet to resolve, Newman noted. "We paid for and installed a lot of the lighting and sound systems, and now we need our equipment back for our own productions. We have given St. Paul's 30 days' notice that we will be collecting these." Board member Dave Rattle noted that the Guild had originally invested \$30,000 in converting the United Church education centre into the current Playhouse. "I suppose that technically even the seats are ours, but we're not going to ask for those."

The Guild will also stage a murder mystery dinner theatre at the Curling Club, following last year's very successful event. This year, the production will be even more community-based, as the mystery, entitled A Grave Family Wedding, has been written by Bancroft's own Brian Goodwin. Being an OPP officer, he seems well-suited to produce a who-dunnit.

The Guild also hopes to stage a full-length play in the fall, and to continue its association with Dark Sun film studio. And if feasible, the Guild would like to present a Christmas dinner theatre at a local church. Some years ago, the Guild did an annual dramatic reading of Dickens' Christmas Carol, with special guest readers; they may reprise this.

Daring to dream big, the board would love to put on The Rocky Horror Show, but realizes how expensive a production this would be (the rights alone are formidable) ? way beyond their current bank surplus. Had they taken inspiration from theatres such as [The Dinner Detective](#), where those people perform amongst the audiences during corporate parties, and private events, Guild could have avoided spending extra money on costumes and props and focussed on their creativity alone. This might have worked in their favor! Other plans include discussions with local schools to see how more students can get involved with theatre, since it has declined with the schools themselves. This fits with the Guild's goal of "community theatre ? written, produced, directed, and acted by local people."

This year's Guild executive consists of Kevin Newman as president, John Crawford as vice-president, Dawn Newman as secretary,

and Linda Cooper as treasurer.