

As the days keep ticking by (is it really May already??) and the national news grows more disturbing, I find myself increasingly in need of a good laugh. I believe in the positive effects and power of laughter, so I like to laugh often, and just in time, PAPA is brewing a laugh-fest on May 15, 16 and 17 with their production of *'Dearly Beloved'*. I don't want to give away the storyline but suffice it to say that a good 'ol boy, Southern redneck town in Texas is the setting for a wedding of hysterical proportions. But this 'place' doesn't just suddenly burst forth; it takes monumental man-hours, rehearsals and preparation for PAPA (Putnam Alliance for the Performing Arts) to make a couple of hours of mayhem fly by.

Production of the play began with auditions back in March when all 11 roles were cast. Some of the players are experienced, like Sarah Daly Weir who is also directing, but there are others who are stepping on stage for the very first time. Years ago my mother, quite shockingly, caught the acting bug and was part of *Steel Magnolias* and *The Cemetery Club*. The entire family was bemused by her latent thespian interest, but no one was more surprised by how much she liked it and how well she did than Mom herself. It's no small task to learn all the lines and, in the days before ipods, she could be found at all hours with her cassette player and earphones seemingly talking to herself. We were all incredibly proud of her accomplishment and, I dare say, those who are first-timers in *Dearly Beloved* will finish this experience with a deserved sense of self-confidence and accomplishment, too. I'm pulling for them because that's the beauty of small town local theater: you can step out of your comfort zone and still be among friends.

Besides Sarah, we have other seasoned actors in Bill Dudley, Karen Oyler, Chris Huskins, Skip Haas, Felice Dissmeyer and Dottie McClain. My hat's off to Dottie, in particular, because she has been fighting a serious vision problem and had to step in when one of the cast members withdrew and no replacement could be found. Dottie and Dennis McClain have been running PAPA for almost 20 years and to say they pour themselves into these productions wholeheartedly is the understatement of the year. Truth is, these plays would likely never happen if it wasn't for their sheer tenacity.

While acting is the main focus, getting the set designed and built is no small thing. Lots of talented people give untold hours to building, erecting and painting the sets, including our artist-from-heaven Janice Salter. It's Janice who puts on the finishing details such as the hand-painted stained glass windows, but there are also hours and miles of scouring junk shops and used clothing stores to find just the right ensemble for the characters. The accumulation of props takes as many weeks and months as it does for the actors to learn their lines, but that detail is lost on an audience once the curtain opens. Pay attention to the set when you see the play, nothing on stage will be there by accident.

All in all, I simply have to tell you that PAPA has made and contributed more money to the Arts Foundation than any other show or event we hold and I'm really proud of them for that. It doesn't come easily and is over in a flash, but they always leave the audience in a better frame of mind. For the modest sum of \$20 per person (or \$15 for the Sunday matinee), come set aside the news of the day and escape to a much funnier place.

On the heels of *Dearly Beloved* will be the annual Celebrate Patriotism event out on the plaza on May 21, free of charge. And at the end of Dairy Festival Day will be our second 'Eatonton's Got Talent' show with cash prizes of \$250, \$150 and \$100. I sat in on the auditions this week and can tell you without hesitation that we have some rather talented folks around here. But, watching PAPA productions, we already knew that. Come support the next generation of PAPA recruits.

See you at The Plaza!