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Theater: Love of the artform draws volunteers to community theatre

By Lorin McLain, The Daily Courier

The play's the thing

PRESCOTT - It's only a dress rehearsal, but a nervous energy permeates the air behind the set of "The Children's Hour" the evening before press night on Tuesday.

A few of the actors are doing repeated costume look-overs in front of the makeup mirrors.

Director Jean Lippincott is darting in and out of the dressing rooms calling characters to the stage to check their appearance under the lights.

"I think you need some lipstick, Paul. And a little more blush," Lippincott says to Paul Epoch, a lead in the play.

Lippincott gathers the cast and crew to join hands for a pep talk before stage director Dick Padgett calls for the first-appearing actors to get ready.

"Just go out there and have fun," she says on a final note.

As with other community theater shows, dress rehearsal is the culmination of weeks of line memorizing, costume fittings, set-building and three-hour rehearsals every night after working a full day at regular jobs - all for the love of the craft.

Lippincott said she started auditions in mid-November, followed with three nights of character development with the selected actors, and started rehearsing on Nov. 27. "It's not easy," she said of producing a show running past two hours in a matter of weeks.

Lippincott, whose day job is running a private practice in psychotherapy, started her work in theater with an acting group in Santa Monica and learned directing technique through the PFAA's mentorship program, which pairs applicants with directors experienced in aspects of stage production like sound and light design, props, movement and working with the actors.

"The director is responsible for making the play interesting - for telling the story so that the playwright is honored and the public enjoys it," she said.

"It's quite an extensive thing. You have to know everything about the theater process to direct community theatre. It's fun, but it's hard," she added.

Acting experience for shows like this one ranges from none to actors with more than 20 years on the boards. In between are those who have studied at the collegiate level or through workshops.

"Workshopping is like the difference between a band practicing and a band not practicing," said Epoch, adding that he studied drama at the [University of Arizona](#).

"I've been in and out of it for about 25 years. I take a year off every now and then to keep my family and life together, and my job," he added.

Chino Valley senior Briana Poland, who plays the lead as a malicious schoolgirl in "The Children's Hour," said she tried out for the PFAA show to broaden her experience outside of school productions.

"You have to spend a lot of time learning your lines. You have to be here five, sometimes six days a week," she said, adding that for the first few weeks after getting the part, she spent about an hour a day of her own time working on lines.

"It's basically going from work to rehearsals," said Jill Goodell Hale, a paralegal and another lead who has been involved with the PFAA since her role in "Black Comedy," the theater's grand opening production in the summer of 1970.

Hale said she spends the hour or two between work and rehearsal getting into character and learning lines.

Lippincott said other directors involved with the PFAA, like Bruce Lanning and Randy Faulkner, volunteer for set construction for most of the shows.

"We pretty much have the same people. We have to find people who have time to donate and who have the passion, because we don't pay anything and it's a lot of work.

"And I'll tell you what, if you ask, why do we do it? We do it because we have to," she said.