

President's Message for the 2017 Annual Report

Hello friends,

This is my final letter as your theatre President. It seems like just yesterday that I joined the board – although it was 3 ½ years ago! I started out in Marketing and then transitioned to Vice-President for one year and then President for these past two. Initially, my time on the board was challenging – lots of moving pieces, a lot of different (sometimes stubborn) personalities but in all honesty – we could express our differences and always put the theatre first – well, at least that was always the goal. I genuinely appreciate the support you have given me and the vote of confidence to lead the theatre – I am thankful for the opportunity to be involved with remarkable volunteers. I have made many new friends on this journey and hope to continue those friendships. As many of you know, my first term has come to an end and while I am eligible to run for a second term, I, along with my family, have decided it is time to step back. My children only have a few more years left before heading off to college and my wife and I will be focusing more time and attention on them over the next few years; which isn't to say we aren't going to be involved at the theatre – we just won't be leading any projects.

The 2016-2017 season has been an exciting year on the stage at the Williamsburg Players. We opened the season with *Jekyll & Hyde*, the Musical, directed by Jonathan McCormick. We then jumped right in to the election season by bringing you *The Best Man* directed by Neil Hollands. Third in our line-up was *Six Degrees of Separation* directed by Michael Epton followed by *Joseph and The Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* directed by Dana Margulies Cauthen and we wrapped up our regular season with *On Golden Pond* directed by Julie King. Throughout the season, we also offered other opportunities to enjoy the playhouse with children's shows and special events – hopefully you had an opportunity to experience our summer show, *Next to Normal*. This production was unique in that we produced the show in support of NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness – specifically the Williamsburg chapter. Throughout the 6 show run, you, the audience members dug deep and were able to raise over \$3000 for the local chapter. It has been a fantastic season and I would like to thank all those involved in making these productions possible; for their time, their energy, and their passion.

While we have shared much success on stage this past year, we also lost two important people who were involved with the theatre for many years; Kathleen Walden and Peter Natale. Kathleen was most recently your theatre secretary and was involved in many productions over the years at the Williamsburg Players and other community theatres throughout the Peninsula. She always brought a smile and a unique energy to the room and will be missed dearly. Peter was involved in seeing the original theatre transformed into the space we are using today and he too was involved in many of the productions at the Players as well as throughout the area. Peter had a large personality and everyone knew when he was in the room. They will both be missed.

As I said, thank you again for the opportunity to serve this past year as your President. I had a great group of fellow board members, staff members, and volunteers to keep the theatre up and running and the success of the theatre was only possible because of them. Over this past year, this Board has accomplished much and I know you have seen and experienced their hard work and dedication. To name a few of the improvements the theatre has seen; Sound improvements, lighting improvements, a refreshed website (thanks to Scott Hayes for the website conversion to the new format) – just to name a few of the improvements we've made to enhance your theatre experience - and the list doesn't stop there - we have a number of other improvements that will be phased in throughout the coming year.

In addition to those who have performed in the shows, volunteered to run the box office and concessions area, built sets, made costumes, collected props, ran lights, painted sets, moved furniture, styled hair, the list is endless....I would be remiss if I did not personally thank you; the season subscriber, the donor, the single ticket purchaser. Without your financial support we would not be able to bring you high quality productions and performances. We are also thankful to those organizations that have made generous contributions to our theatre; The Williamsburg Area Arts Commission, The York County Arts Commission, and the Kiwanis Club of Toano.

As we close out this past season I am excited to highlight the shows you will see in the 2017-18 season: *You're a Good Man Charlie Brown*, *Dandelion Wine*, *Lucky Stiff*, *Anne of Green Gables*, and *Jane Eyre* the musical. Thank you for renewing your season subscription for the upcoming season - it is truly one of the best values in town. If you haven't had a chance to renew, it is never too late.

We are also excited to continue recognizing those who donate above and beyond the season subscription amount with the Giving Tree. Your support is important; allowing us to continue to provide extraordinary theatre, affordable tickets and outreach programs for our community. To recognize your generosity, your name will be prominently engraved on a "leaf" that will be placed on the Giving Tree which will be located in the lobby. This Tree will grow and expand as our membership (and your theatre) continues to grow - all thanks to you, our donors. We have several levels of membership available and any of our board members will be happy to discuss this exciting new recognition program as well as answer any questions you might have for making a donation amount which is not listed – up to and including naming rights to the theatre. To supplement the Giving Tree, we have updated our targeted donation list in the event you would like to sponsor a specific item for the theatre. This targeted donation list can be found on our website and any of the Board members would be happy to talk with you about this system focused program.

Please continue to provide feedback; your comments, your suggestions, your thoughts about the theater, the shows you experience, the shows you perform in – your Board of Directors wants to hear from you – it is one way for us to ensure we continue to improve your theatre experience.

We appreciate your support, your love and your dedication to the theatre.

I look forward to seeing the next season and I continue to be excited with the direction the theatre is headed. I trust you are as well. Thank you again.

Yours in theatre,

Michael Westenberger

2016-2017 Annual Reports

Volunteer Director Report – Rani Wachter

This ends my three- year commitment as Volunteer Director for Williamsburg Players. It has been a pleasure volunteering as one of Williamsburg Players' board members. In the past three years, we have added nearly 400 volunteers and their contact information to our volunteer list. Sign Up invitations, for ushering and concessionaires get sent to 400 email addresses before each show. We have hosted several volunteer appreciation parties, tours, trainings, and gatherings. We have many "break a Leg" posters in the dressing rooms. Dressing rooms have been cleaned and cleared for incoming casts when previous casts forgot to do so. We have been through many gallons of ice cream, balloons, baskets of candy, bottles of wine, and cards. There is now a page on our website with volunteer information, including an online volunteer form. You can now email the volunteer director directly

We have worked and played together to keep theater alive and well at Williamsburg Players. Please continue to volunteer your time and recruit others to help out at Williamsburg Players. If you are an actor, please consider working behind the scenes from time to time. If you have questions for the board, please ask them directly. Kindly, remember that board members are volunteers too with other full time jobs and that they are doing the best they can do to keep all the wheels turning. All board emails are posted on the website.

If you see a problem, be the solution.

Most of all, keep having fun!

Take care my dear WP family. Thank you for the wild ride!

Production Director Report – Brandon Lyles

The state of the American theatre continues to evolve at the community level and we, as a Williamsburg institution with 60 years of history, must continue to grow and evolve with it. This is no simple task when there are many places competing for audience's attention and entertainment dollars. How do we provide a unique experience that

engages our audiences, challenges our members, grows our talent and meets our financial obligations? How do we remain relevant at a time when there is a division between our audiences and talent in terms of offering the traditional, the modern or perhaps even the more evocative? These are the questions that we keep running up against and seek to resolve. Is there a simple answer? If there were, theatre companies throughout the country might be a lot happier and feel less pressure when making tough choices. As we move into our exciting 61st season, I believe we need to keep addressing these important questions while maintaining our focus on our mission.

For those who may not be familiar with our mission, here it is...

The Williamsburg Players is a non-profit community theater committed to enriching and broadening the cultural life and experience of the Greater Tidewater Community. Our mission is to present professional quality theater productions which challenge, stimulate, educate, and entertain our audiences, members and volunteers. Hands on teaching and scholarship programs provide opportunities for education, experience, growth, and challenge.

We continue to focus on elevating the quality of our offerings while using them to better educate all members involved in the productions. Seeking to achieve consistency in our operations will help us to achieve a higher quality in performance. I believe that we are beginning to see positive growth in this area and we will continue to make this a focus throughout our 61st season.

We are continuing to rent our facilities to various other community groups whenever we have availability. This past year, we have had more requests for rentals than we were able to accommodate. Recently, with the unfortunate closing of the Kimball Theatre, rental requests have grown considerably. We continue to try to accommodate as many requests as we can, but need to ensure that they do not cause hardships with our regular season offerings and already planned special events.

We are continuing to develop our volunteer base and throughout the season we have had the privilege of bringing in new talent in various areas. We are constantly seeking great people with a desire to help us achieve our mission. We know that we are nothing without the dedication of the many volunteers who come together to achieve something greater than themselves. I personally appreciate all of the dedication, hard work, and countless hours these talented people donate to our cause.

I appreciate the opportunity to serve on the Board of Directors and work with such great talent and friendly people who genuinely have the best interests of our mission at heart.

Technical Director Report – Scott Hayes

Outside of normal maintenance, our lighting hardware was stable. Most of my time was spent lighting this season's shows. We are still investigating a LED CYC lighting system. Due to the cost (\$13,000) this project is on hold until funding is available.

We purchased a 50'x18' black scrim which was used in two productions this year ("Six Degrees of Separation" and "On Golden Pond"). "Jean Eyre" is planning on using the scrim next spring.

Two portable speakers were acquired (one through a donation, one purchased). These were used in this season's cabarets, "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat", and "Next To Normal". These speakers can be used independently of our sound system via direct input or Bluetooth connections from phones and tablets – useful for auditions and rehearsals.

The speakers on the rear wall of the house were fixed. These speakers were moved to main speaker location to improve sound coverage in the seats.

Additional sound baffles are being built. Additional wall-pipes for lighting are also planned for the fall.

Season Development Director Report – Julie King

I joined the Williamsburg Players Board of Directors last year, and have so enjoyed working with our volunteers and staff. It is an honor to be a part of this theatre community of dedicated and hard-working people.

The Season Selection Committee, which is my primary responsibility as Season Development Director, experienced a reorganization and defined purpose, which helped us prepare a slate of productions for consideration for the upcoming season. We met regularly, mostly monthly, and developed a master list of shows for consideration. Our group of eight completed multiple readings of more than fifty plays and musicals and compiled detailed reviews of each show.

At the end of the calendar year, we reviewed the shows submitted by interested directors who had completed the online submission form. We then invited directors whose productions seemed to suit our capabilities, audience, and mission to prepare a short presentation for the committee. These presentations were held individually with each director in January, and included a question-and-answer period with each director. From these resources, and much discussion, we presented a slate of shows and directors for the 2017-2018 season to the board for approval, which was given.

The reorganization of the committee worked very well and we will continue using this system through the upcoming year. I thank all the members of the committee for their diligence in completing the important tasks of reading, reviewing, and discussing so many plays and musicals. All are enthusiastic about theatre, the Players, and working together to complete our task.

We continually update the list of shows for consideration, using suggestions from our patrons who complete the online suggestion form, and suggestions from committee

members. We are also exploring ways to encourage more directors to consider working with Williamsburg Players.

I look forward to the exciting challenge of filling the 2017-2018 season!

Special Events and Education Director Report – Marcia Dadds

It's been a pleasure to work as Special Events and Education Coordinator. Deborah Soderholm created a smooth transition for me into this Special Events position.

Jeffrey Seyller cabaret series in the lobby was already established and I acted in essence as Production Manager for all three Cabarets in the series, (I was performer in the Music of Jason Robert Brown). This involved assisting with playbills, setting up the lobby, locating and recruiting ushers and concessionaires, adding pre-packaged cheese, cracker, fruit, and/or nut snack packs to concession menu offerings, creating social media event invites, listing the Cabaret series in local community event listings such as the VA Gazette, and WY Daily. I helped establish ongoing promotional relationship with WMBG radio and the VA Gazette for interviews and marketing not only for the cabaret but for each main stage show. Created a marketing proposal and approached Jamestown Pie Company with proposal to sponsor/partner with Cabaret Crazy Ever After since the musical Waitress was featured in that Cabaret and it's all about pie! However, after much initial interest they decided again it at the last minute.

The lobby works very well for this type of musical venue and the series was well received and attended. Auditions went smoothly and there were many talented WP regulars and some new faces as well!

October 2016 Cabaret – “History Lessons – a rock cabaret”

December 2016 Cabaret – “The Music of Jason Robert Brown”

February 2017 Cabaret- “Crazy Ever After”

I communicated with Delores Jones of the Lambda Lambda Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha about partnering with the theatre for a Special Event. She wanted to help fill seats with her many contacts in the community and promote a show and be able to get a piece of the ticket price. She was offered possibility of partnership with James Cameron show, but she was unavailable for the Feb 18 date.

I was instrumental in scheduling and acting as Production Manager for a lobby Special performance event with James Cameron, who portrays historical character John Rollison. For this event, I created the playbill, set up the lobby, facilitated interview between VA Gazette and WMBG radio with Mr. Cameron, locating and recruiting ushers and concessionaires, created social media event invite, listed the performance in local community event listings such as the VA Gazette, and WY Daily. His event was well attended and between tickets and concessions we raised almost \$900.00 for the

theatre. Mr. Cameron donated his services and plans to return again to the lobby on March 3, 2018.

I (and the Board) am currently having ongoing communication with Amy Stallings about potential Special event for Oct 2019. She is coordinating the 2019 Annual General Meeting of the Jane Austen Society of North America (JASNA), which is scheduled to take place at the Williamsburg Lodge October 4th through 6th, 2019. The conference is planned around the theme of Austen's novel *Northanger Abbey*. In keeping with the theme, she plans to offer is a fully staged presentation of her musical version of *Northanger Abbey*, which she previewed and well-received as a staged reading at the Williamsburg Library in July of 2015.

The musical, *Next to Normal*, as a Special event on main stage was already established in the WP calendar when I joined the Board. For this event, I was point of contact between the Next to Normal production team and the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) chapter in Williamsburg. It was agreed that this production of Next to Normal would be in support of NAMI. I also arranged for VA Gazette interviews with production team and NAMI plus the WMBG radio interview. The Community event promotional listings were also part of my responsibility as well as inviting area mental health professionals to friends and family night as well as soliciting mental health professional ads for the playbill. The production raised \$3,170 in support of NAMI.

I (and the Board) met with Sydney Moore, professional Director, Actor and Meisner workshop teacher from Chicago who has relocated to Williamsburg. She was initially interested in conducting an adult only acting workshop in residence at the theatre with WP. Due to the demands of her specific program proposal, scheduling her significant and very detailed space needs around our already jammed calendar at the theatre was unfortunately not possible.

The Special Event on main stage called Leading Ladies and starring local Broadway veteran Tiffany Haas was proposed by Jeffrey Seyller for September 29-October 1. His proposal was presented to me and accepted by the Board. Auditions for local area women are scheduled for Monday, August 7.

I have had the pleasure of arranging for two upcoming musical concerts, one in the lobby and one on main stage:

- Phil Poteat has agreed to bring his incredible local, vocal and piano talent to our lobby for his one man musical evening at 7 pm on Friday night November 24, 2017. He was last seen at WP in The Music of Jason Robert Brown and sang back-up vocals for Next to Normal.
- Robert Hodge, popular worldwide and local area classical pianist and vocalist as well as WMBG personality, is tentatively scheduled for a main stage concert on Saturday night November 25, 2017 at 8 pm.

A Christmas Carol starring Brink Miller will be performed on our main stage December 7-9 and 14-16. Brink Miller reprises his role as Ebenezer Scrooge, having portrayed the character in Atlanta for over 20 seasons. This Special Event was previously arranged before my tenure, but I am pleased to be Production Manager for this family classic.

I am also continuing discussions with Jeffrey Seyller who is interested in continuing with 3 performances each of another two lobby Cabarets—February 23, 24, 25 and April 27, 28 and 29. The titles of his shows are yet to be determined, but are likely to include per WP patron and donor feedback, well known vocal numbers from classic Broadway composers.

Maintenance Director Report – Steve Olsen

Maintained all systems and had them serviced,

Purchased new shed and had it painted.

Built sound panel frames.

Ordered light ladders.