

Bundle Up Sale! \$1/mo.



From left, artistic director Stephen Brotebeck and executive director Ruth Ann Burke pose Saturday in the new rehearsal area at the Okoboji Summer Theatre grounds in Okoboji, Iowa.

Justin Wan, Sioux City Journal

OKOBOJI, Iowa -- As a 62nd season of shows beckons, a new building on **the Okoboji Summer Theatre grounds** will be used for a rehearsal hall by actors hailing from across America.

A benefactor from Omaha, Anne Thorne Weaver, gave money to cover the entire cost of the 4,800-square-foot building, which is south of the main stage. Ruth Ann Burke, executive director of the Okoboji Summer Theatre, said it's a major upgrade, replacing a dormitory that dated to the 1960s.

"It is going to be a wonderful game-changer to have a new rehearsal space for all the guests we bring in from all over the nation," Burke said Wednesday.

She was referencing how the summer theater since the late 1950s has used young actresses from Stephens College in Missouri and other actors of varying ages, from such places as New York, Seattle, Minneapolis, Atlanta and St. Louis, to fill the cast roles.

During the summer, many of the actors live in 15 tiny houses spread over the theater grounds. The new rehearsal hall, dining room and kitchen, called Weaver Commons, will make their time there more enjoyable, Burke said.

Burke said the hall will be the site for developing acting, dancing and music chops, plus preparing the meals to keep all the performers going. She declined to specify the cost of Weaver Commons.

All the actors arrived by early June, then within one week hammered out practices to pull off the first show, "Honky Tonk Angels," a musical that opens Tuesday evening.

The Stephens College students in one specific major must spend at least one summer at Okoboji Summer Theatre, filling out acting or a variety of backstage roles.

"Most of the them will be in three, four, five shows," Burke said.

"The students who pursue theater are very engaged in it, and willing to do hard work. I think that shows on the stage, that shows in the work."



The new Weaver Commons dining area is shown at the Okoboji Summer Theatre grounds in Okoboji, Iowa.

Justin Wan, Sioux City Journal

Aubrey Hicks, a native of Warrensburg, Missouri, will graduate from Stephens once her summer at OST is done. This is the first extended time Hicks has spent in Iowa, and she said Friday her first week has gone well.

"The area is amazing. I love the lake and the vibes that the towns give off. They are very warm and welcoming to us," she said.

Hicks, who has been acting since age 6, will appear in all four musicals that will be presented. Between her roles in the first two musicals, "Honky Tonk Angels" and "Mamma Mia," she expects to work with costumes and the box office.

"We have got to learn how to do this out in the real world for our careers," said Hicks, who plans in September to begin working on the **restoration of the Greer Garson Theatre in Santa Fe**, New Mexico.

"We are getting things done pretty fast, because we only have one week to get this show ready. We have been collaborating really well with each other and getting things done, so we can have a good performance," Hicks said.

The 2019 season includes nine shows in nine weeks, from Tuesday through Sunday each week, and lots of Okoboji area residents keep snapping up season tickets.



Weaver Commons, a new rehearsal hall, dining room and kitchen, is shown on the Okoboji Summer Theatre grounds in Okoboji, Iowa.

Justin Wan, Sioux City Journal

"Some of these people have been coming since the late '50s, early '60s," Burke said.

The performing theater holds 416 seats, and was last remodeled in 2007. Burke said Okoboji Summer Theatre officials are always looking to keep facilities fresh, since visitors really like coming to see shows.

"It is very important for the community to have performing and visual arts," Burke said. "They have supported us, season after season."

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Okoboji Summer Theatre season

Honky Tonk Angels, June 11-16

Murder on the Orient Express, June 18-23

Steel Magnolias, June 25-30

Mary Poppins, July 2-7

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, July 9-14

Happily Every After, July 16-21

Beehive -- The 60's Musical, July 23-28

Living On Love, July 30-Aug. 4

Mamma Mia! Aug. 6-11

For tickets, visit the OST Box Office at www.okobojisummertheatre.org



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