



Darlene Goodwin, playing Clairee, listens to an irritated Ouisier, played by Leah Ritz-Smyth, during the Windmill Theatre Players production of Steel Magnolias in April.

Leah acts for the fun of it

PHOTO AND STORY BY PAM DOYLE

The people and the atmosphere at Windmill Theatre Players productions and rehearsals are the reason Leah Ritz-Smyth is involved. She recently played Ouisier in the play Steel Magnolias.

"It's not what you do, but who you do it with," Ritz-Smyth said.

Rehearsing with members of the group is more fun than work, she added.

"When you live in Calgary and drive to High River three times a week, it's not because you have to, it's because you want to," she said.

Mrs. Markham was a hilarious British comedy presented by Windmill in 1987 when Ritz-Smyth landed her first small part. She went on to play a major Windmill role in The Hand that Rocks the Cradle in 1988.

"I like comedy, it's a lot of fun. The comedy really comes easy," Ritz-Smyth said.

But she also likes dramatic parts.

"They tend to stretch you a bit more," she said.

Although she is not set on attaining fame and fortune, Ritz-Smyth was cast for a part with Theatre '80, a semi-profes-

sional acting group in Calgary, in 1992. Unfortunately her character was changed and she did not end up acting.

In Steel Magnolias, Ritz-Smyth was playing Shirley Maclean's part from the movie version.

As Ouisier, she was a rich, eccentric older woman.

"They called her a curmudgeon, but she really wasn't a bad person. She took things at face value and said what she thought," Ritz-Smyth said.

Her part was one of six strong women's roles. After rehearsing for four months, the group began to gel.

"We had something unique in common," Ritz-Smyth said.

After months of rehearsing before an empty hall, an audience can set the mood for the performance.

"It's totally different when people are there. They're not just viewers, they are a big part of the performance," Ritz-Smyth said.

The charismatic actress said that she will be interested in auditioning for the musical Oklahoma, to be presented next fall.

But until then she will enjoy summer weekends golfing with her friends from Windmill Theatre Players in Nanton.

LIGHTS, DRAMA, ACTION!



photo by Pam Doyle

Cast members of the Windmill Theatre Players production *Steel Magnolias* give juice to the character Shelby, in a beauty salon. From left are Darlene Goodwin, Shannon Simington, Michele Desmouline, and Carla Schmidt. Leah Ritz and Nina Cameron also star in the play about the life and times of ladies in a southern state. It runs at the Highwood Memorial Centre April 25 and 26.

WINDMILL THEATRE PLAYERS

Windmill cultivates 'Steel Magnolias'

Susan **COOPER**
TIMES CONTRIBUTOR

In the end it's a product greater than the sum of its parts. Right now, however, as deadlines fast approach, it's a flurry of minute details.

The cast and crew of Windmill Theatre Players' spring production of *Steel Magnolias* are working late nights to bring to High River this charming and uplifting story.

"It's full of crisp dialogue and quotable witticisms," said Karen King, the play's producer who, together with the play's directors, has an acute sensitivity to the play's nuances.

"There's a very interesting balance to be struck, and the timing is crucial," she continued. "The actors are definitely beginning to express both elements. This has been a very exciting production to watch come together."

King said *Steel Magnolias* is the "perfect spring play", full of laughter and characters easy to care about, all of which is made more poignant by a touch of tragedy.

"I think people will walk away

from this production feeling very fulfilled by the experience," said King, "especially given the level of talent on the stage. We're very lucky..."

DINNER THEATRE

"We're very lucky," echoed dinner theatre manager, Marlene Suito, "to have theatre of this quality at a local level. And the dinner theatre evenings make the whole theatre experience even more fulfilling."

As per tradition, the play's run opens with three nights of dinner theatre, April 17, 18 and 19.

A lavish menu is planned, commencing with cocktails at 6 p.m., followed by a buffet dinner sure to satisfy all appetites.

The lights dim for the curtain call at 8 p.m. For ticket information, call Marlene at 652-7605.

REGULAR THEATRE

Regular theatre runs April 25 and 26, with an 8 p.m. curtain call. The matinee runs at 2 p.m. on Sunday, April 20. Tickets for these performances are available through Pickersgill's Clothing at 652-2252.

local color



Darlene Goodwin plays the 66-year-old grande dame widow of the former mayor in *Steel Magnolias*.



Shannon Simington, (left), playing Truvy, the beauty shop owner, talks to her new employer, Anelle, played by Nina Cameron.

Windmill veteran in *Steel Magnolias*

PHOTOS AND STORY BY PAM DOYLE

The world is a musical place for Darlene Goodwin.

Her character as Clairee Belcher in the play *Steel Magnolias* is one of many parts, many of them musicals, she has taken in Windmill Theatre Players productions.

Joining Windmill in 1984, Goodwin worked behind the scenes, on make up, hair, publicity, and sat on the executive. She played Yente in *Fiddler on the Roof* in 1986. She was Agnes in *Mame*, and sang in many choruses. Goodwin has acted in and directed one act plays. Last year she was assistant director for *Mousetrap*.

Growing up in Saskatchewan, Goodwin was in a folk group with five teenage girls who performed in the Woolco shopping mall.

"I love to sing. We represented the province in a multi-cultural event in Regina," Goodwin said.

Her family was very musical and they enjoyed getting together for family sing-a-longs.

"My parents are Ukrainian and we sang old Ukrainian folk songs," she said.

While growing up Goodwin learned to play piano, guitar, clarinet and violin. She was in the Moose Jaw marching band for three years.

After moving to Calgary in 1978, Goodwin received her Bachelor of Education and worked as a teacher. Married to Jim Goodwin, the couple has what she calls a blended family. She has a 23 year old son named Josh. Jim has three children, Levi, Dorian and Jerrica, and the couple had a child together, two year old Alyssa.

When Josh was 11 years old he played Winthrop in the *Music Man*, and that is how Goodwin started her acting experience with Windmill.

She has also been actively involved with the High River and District Lions Music Festival for the past six years and is secretary this year. But her part in *Steel Magnolias* takes some time

to prepare. Repetition is needed to memorize lines and she studies them at home and on the run.

"I take the book everywhere. When I am driving I'll have someone in the car read the lines," she said.

The character she plays is 66 years old, halfway between her age and what she considers old. She spent a lot of time studying women of that age group just for this play.

"I discovered 66 is not old, and that women that age can be incredibly beautiful and classy," Goodwin said.

Her character mixes well with the other five women in the play.

"I think the characters in the play have been really well cast. The actors have become a closely knit group, and I think we'll get to know each other very well by the end of the production," she said.



Leah Ritz, (left), playing Ousier Boudreaux, the wealthy curmudgeon, reacts to Carla Schmidts, playing M'Lynn Eatenton, Shelby's mother.



Steel Magnolias co-directors Laura Ferguson, (left), and Karen Stewart give advice to actors rehearsing on stage. Photo by Pam Doyle

entertainment

Carla worked overtime on Steel Magnolia role



Michele Desmoulin, playing Shelby, (left), is assisted through a diabetic seizure by Carla Schmidt, who plays M'Lynn, Shelby's mother, in a recent performance of Steel Magnolias at the Memorial Centre in High River.

PHOTO AND STORY BY PAM DOYLE

Carla Schmidt has been feeling the magical effect of performing on stage during Windmill Theatre Players presentation of Steel Magnolias.

Playing M'Lynn, who is Shelby's mother, Schmidt has surprised herself to find that she can leave herself behind and become another person on stage.

"It's just the oddest thing. I'm not a real public speaker, but I just love acting. I've never thought of myself as the person on stage," Schmidt said.

She also loves the part she played and worked very hard at attaining the position.

"I must have the distinction of being the most prepared person to play a part. I worked on it for two months before rehearsal

started," she said.

M'Lynn is a very strong character in the play. She is very controlled and unflappable, Schmidt said.

"She is married to a good old boy. He's just a little adventurous," she said.

In real life Schmidt is married to Ron Schmidt, who is the barber at Schmidt's Barber Shop.

"I'm the shop coordinator," said Carla, mother of two children.

They moved to High River from Bragg Creek seven years ago.

Ron Schmidt has also been involved with Windmill, and was Mr. Bumble in the play Oliver two years ago.

He is a member of the men's singing group, the Western Hospitality Singers.

He also helps many other people with the backstage work needed to put on a major production.

"I was really impressed with how beautiful the stage was. The backstage people never really get mentioned or acknowledged," Carla Schmidt said.

One of the features of the set, made to look like a beauty salon, was that the sinks on stage had real-running water. Hairdressers from Head's Up in High River and Hair salon helped train the actors to act like hairdressers.

"All of those other people who helped out put in as many hours as the actors," Schmidt said.

The play Steel Magnolias was a success with large audiences for all performances and sold out dinner theatres.



Windmill Theatre
Players

Presents



STEEL
MAGNOLIAS

by Robert Harling

Highwood Memorial Centre
High River, Alberta
April 17 - 20, 25 - 26, 1997

Produced by special arrangement with Dramatists Play Service, Inc.



Windmill Theatre Players

OPEN AUDITIONS
for the musical production
OKLAHOMA!

Sunday, September 14, 2 p.m.
Monday, September 15, 7 p.m.
at the Highwood Memorial Centre.

Adult Parts Only (minimum age 16)

PIANO PLAYERS NEEDED

Production Dates: November 20-23, 28-29

For more information contact
Karen at 686-9514 or Marlene at 652-7605.



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Founded in 1905
by Charles Clark




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!!!LIGHT UP HIGH RIVER-SEE PAGE 19

OKLAHOMA!



photo by Pam Doyle

Windmill Theatre Players principal leads for Oklahoma!, Michelle Beauchamp-DeDominicis and Gordon Scott sing a duet during the musical. See page 13 for more photos.

 Windmill Theatre Players
present
Rodgers & Hammerstein's
Oklahoma
Highwood Memorial Centre
High River
~Matinee~
Sunday, November 23 at 2 p.m.
All Tickets \$8
~Evenings~
Friday, Saturday, November 28 & 29 at 8 p.m.
Adults \$10 - Seniors and Children \$8
Tickets for reserved seating on sale at
Pickersgill's Clothing, High River
Dinner Theatre Performances - November 20, 21 & 22
Special Dessert Theatre Performance - November 27
For ticket information call 652-7605

MUSICAL HIT

Tickets are now on sale for Oklahoma

by **anne MOYNHAM**
TIMES CONTRIBUTOR

Tickets to Windmill Theatre Players' Dinner Theatre productions of *Oklahoma* are now available from Marlene Sutor at 652-7605. The dinner theatre dates this year are Nov. 20 - Nov. 22.

In addition, an extra performance has been added this year — a Dessert Theatre to be held on Nov.

27. Marlene also has tickets for that performance.

Rehearsals are well underway.

There are about 30 people in the cast and several more working behind the scenes. They are all working hard to bring you a great show. The director, Karen King has plenty of experience. She has been involved in many productions since she joined Windmill in 1985.

Oklahoma contains some of

the best known songs of the twentieth century and has been a popular theatre production since it was written in the 1940s. This is one show that you won't want to miss. The tickets for the matinee on Nov. 23 and the regular theatre performances Nov. 28 and 29 will go on sale at Pickersgill's Clothing in High River on Oct. 20 (652-2252). All performances are held at the Memorial Centre in High River.

H.R. TIMES Oct. 7 1997

entertainment

Windmill spins open its new season

PHOTOS AND STORY
BY PAM DOYLE

Oh, what a beautiful morning it was on Sept. 16, as director Karen King, producer Marlene Sutor and musical director Bonnie Duffell awoke secure with the knowledge that their cast had been selected for Windmill Theatre Players' upcoming musical *Oklahoma!*.

Lead roles have been awarded to Windmill newcomer Michelle DeDominicis, piano and singing teacher from Claresholm who will play Laurey, Rachel Kielstra, a receptionist also new to the acting troupe who will play Ado Annie, Gordon Scott, publisher and editor of the Claresholm Local Press will play Curly, High River resident Ray Fox, who works with special needs kids in Calgary will play Will Parker, Dave Burton, with Canadian Western Natural Gas in High River, will play Jud Fry, child

care provider in High River Celia Penman will play Aunt Eller, and Jim Goodwin, a High River farmer will play Ali Hakim.

Thirty other actors will play smaller parts and sing in the chorus. Numerous people will fill backstage positions and volunteers will help to build an impressive set.

Oklahoma! is Rodgers and Hammerstein's first collaboration from the 1940's. Running three hours long, the play is a love story taking place during a conflict between cowboys and farmers. Some of the well known songs include Surrey with the Fringe on Top and Oh, What a Beautiful Morning.

Dinner theatres will be held on Nov. 20, 21, and 22, a Sunday matinee on Nov. 23, dessert theatre on Nov. 27 and evening performances on Nov. 28-29 at the High River Memorial Centre. Ticket sales will be announced soon.



Celia Penman, left, rehearses with Rachel Kielstra, for their upcoming performances in *Oklahoma!*.



Director Karen King video tapes a performance with the help of Steve Penman.