

A Brief History of

THE ST. CLAIR SHORES PLAYERS

Incorporated: November 16, 1959



P.O. BOX 141, ST. CLAIR SHORES, MICHIGAN 48080

www.scsplayers.org

As each year goes by and new members arrive, it becomes imperative that some record be made of what your organization has gone through so that you may have a better understanding of how we arrived at this point.

-- Les Wilson

In the Beginning

In the spring of 1959 a very young mother of four, Jackie Duemling, got together with two other Shores residents, Kenny Revoir and Don Moenart, and discussed why St. Clair Shores lacked a community theater. The talk eventually progressed to, why not start one. Ken and Don were members of the Warren Theatre Guild. This was a group that had started a couple years earlier, and so they had an idea of the basic working of a community theater. The more they thought of it the farther the plan progressed until eventually they decided to go ahead with it.

The first thing they did was to notify the local newspapers like the St. Clair Shores Herald and the Macomb Daily that they were interested in getting people to join as charter members of the St. Clair Shores Community Players. The newspapers picked up on the idea and gave them front page attention. Their efforts succeeded in obtaining more than 54 people to sign up and become charter members.

Now they were ready to roll. They charged each person \$1.00 membership dues which gave them a little money in their treasury to begin their adventure. The next step was to choose a play with a large cast so that a good percentage of the new members would get a chance to perform. They chose an old classic entitled, "The Night of Jan 16th" written by Ayn Rand. This was a courtroom story based on a real life drama of a young wife accused of killing her millionaire husband. Someone knew a teacher at Lakeshore High-school, Robert Ulrich who would be willing to direct the show. (He, some years later became the superintendent of schools in the city of Troy).

Now they were ready to move, but had no scenery or stage to perform on. They then made two brilliant moves.

First they approached the St. Clair Shores city council and asked if they might use the council chambers to perform the play. The chambers were also where the Municipal Court held forth. It was a real courtroom with the Judge's station and Jury box.

You can well imagine that there was some shock and even reluctance from some of the council members. The new building had just opened the year

before in 1958. There was some concern that they might be setting a precedent if they allowed this and other groups may want to do the same.

In the final analyst, however, it wouldn't look very good on their part if they turned their backs on the fledgling civic organization. So they gave permission to use the chambers for a Friday and Saturday in late August of 1959.

The second brilliant move was to ask the mayor, Tom Welch, to take the role of the judge. Since most all politicians are hams at heart, he agreed without hesitation. It wasn't a difficult thing for him to do because they typed the entire play out on legal size paper. So he could follow the play as it progressed and when it was his turn to say his lines, he could almost read them. It looked to the audience though he was flipping through legal papers. By his taking on this role the Players got a lot more publicity.

The whole endeavor proved to be a huge success. They played to a packed house each night. After paying all their incurred expenses, they cleared \$400. Enough to launch them on their way. Four hundred dollars in 1959 was like having more then \$2000 dollar today.

Phase 2

The next thing they did proved to be a real stroke of genius. They became part of the Adult Education. This move gave them they use of a classroom in a school not only for their monthly meetings but also for rehearsals three nights a week. All free of charge. If they had had to pay for any of this for all those years since 1959, it would have added up to a fortune. We have talked to many theater groups in the state that have had to do just that.

They were then assigned to Chippewa Jr. High which was located on Jefferson Ave. near 10 ½ Mile rd. It was formally the Old Lakeview High. Since then it has been torn down and is now the location of the Bon Secour Nursing facility.

The stage at the school was located at one end of the gymnasium. We found that the acoustics were not terrific but at least we now had a home. As for scenery, we received some things from Channel 7 and some old stuff from the Players on Jefferson in Detroit. There were also a lot of flats stored in the wings that originally belong to the old Lakeview High. All those flats eventually became ours.

When the group first formed in the summer, Kenny Revoir was appointed the interim President. Now they held an election and Richard Caruso was

elected the first full time President. Les Wilson became Vice President. It was Caruso's leadership that welded the group into a well organized assembly.

By-laws were adopted and the Players became incorporated on November 16, 1969 there is a statewide organization of Community Players called the Community Theater Association of Michigan (C.T.A.M). It is made up of some ninety groups. We became part of it in about 1961.

We started the first few years doing just two performances of each show. One on Friday and the second on Saturday and charging \$1.00. The superintendent of Lakeview schools would come to see our shows and he remarked once that it was a shame that we put all that effort into a play and do it only for one weekend. Up until then we hadn't realized that we would be allowed to tie up the stage for two weeks. From then on we did all our shows on two weekends.

After a couple years we felt confident enough to tackle a musical. The first one attempted was, "The Pajama Game". We went all out on this show even to forming our own band. We had well over fifty people involved one way or another. Opening night was one of the most spectacular openings, but the second night was a disaster. It was November 22, 1963. That was a date that would stand out forever in the minds of anyone living at the time. It was the day that John F. Kennedy was assassinated! It proved to be an excruciating night as the members assembled at the school early that evening to decide what to do. Some wanted to continue in the old tradition of, "the show must go on!" Others were dead set against it. Even the professional theaters closed that evening. It was finally decided out of respect to the circumstances that we would close down that night. As it turned out, only a few people showed up anyway and they were all understanding as they were turned away.

The Jackie Awards

In 1960 we decided we should give out awards somewhat like the Oscar. The Board of Directors mulled over what to call this award and came to the conclusion that it should be called a Jackie. To be named after our founder, Jackie Duemling and not Jackie Kennedy as one reporter from the Detroit Free Press had hoped.

The Jackie Awards party became our biggest social event right from the start. At first we gave awards for almost every category imaginable including best set design, costumes, make up, lighting and sound effects. Along with these categories were the usual awards for best lead, supporting, featured, and even bit walk on parts call non-featured.

This of course added up to a lot of awards. When we first started out the statues cost about 12 dollars each. Each year however, the expenses increased until the statuettes began costing close to 30 dollars. Thus, the budget began to spiral out of control. It reached a point where we finally decided to give up giving out awards altogether.

This lasted some 15 years until we once again decided to resurrect this entertaining function. This time, however, we narrowed the list of recipients to best (male & female) lead, supporting, featured and the Director.

On the Road

We should mention that there have been a few shows that we have taken on the road. We started doing this in the late sixties with a couple children's plays entitled, "The Red Shoes" and "The Land of the Dragon." They were good money makers for organizations that paid us to bring the show to them.

In the early seventies, the Grosse Pointe Theater had been taking shows to Fenton, Michigan. They had reached a point that they no longer wanted to go to all the trouble of continuing the endeavor. So, they asked us if we would like to take over. We agree, and for three years we took our fall show (after doing it first at home) to the million dollar auditorium in Fenton. The first two shows were a huge success but the last one, "Don't Drink the Water" the Fenton people wanted us to do before we had a chance to do it first at home. Needless to say, this one turned out to be rather bad and we were never asked to come back.

We have found that there are always problems no matter where we are. One of the big problems that appeared after we were at Chippewa for a few years was with the fire marshal. Whenever he made his inspections he would find our storage areas in violation. The school would notify us to find some place else to store our flats and paraphernalia. There was, however, no place that we know of to move to, so we procrastinated.

After a couple years of being continually notified, we were shocked one evening when we arrived at the school to find all of our belongings sitting in a large pile unprotected in the parking lot! This forced us into action in a hurry. We found someone willing to rent us their garage for \$25 a month. We then packed our most valuable things into it and discarded a great deal more.

We were in this position for three or four years. For each show we would have to pick out the flats and other things we needed and bring them to the school to construct the set. Ultimately, the garage owner wanted their building back. So, we were forced once more into finding another garage and move everything over to it. At this point we decided to appeal to the city council for some help. The only thing that they could find available was an old building that

sat behind the Blossom Heath facilities. It had originally been an ice house for the one time road house. It was a large building as far as ice houses go. Maybe 20 X 30 feet. But, it was also decrepit with many shingles missing on the roof. It didn't even have secured doors. With nothing else available and the fact that there would be no charge, we moved into it. We bought large sheets of plastic visqueen to cover everything. This kept not only the rain off, but also the bird droppings. The place was a haven for most of the roosting birds in the neighborhood.

Still, these early years were great. The membership was vibrant. There were many times when we would run out of chairs at our meetings and have to bring some from other rooms. The meeting didn't really close with the sound of the gravel, but would continue at Pat O'Brien's Tavern after -- sometimes into the wee hours.

Many Moves

After thirteen years at the Chippewa location it was decided the time had come to find a more modern location for presenting our shows. We then moved to the new South Lake auditorium on Nine Mile rd. near Mack Ave. It was a beautiful establishment that would hold over 650 people and had a very large stage.

Now we were presented with new problems right from the start. To begin with, we had always been lucky if we had audiences of about one hundred people. In this huge auditorium it always appeared as though there was hardly anybody there.

We were not allowed to operate the lighting system, but had to hire the audio visual instructor at time and a half to do the work. We also had to hire the custodian at time and a half also whenever we were using the stage. All this above and beyond the rental of the facilities.

To make matters worst, the school needed the use of the stage during the week. So, after the first Saturday performance we would have to dismantle the set and store it backstage. Then we would be required to return early the next Friday and re-assemble it. When the show was over, the scenery had to be completely removed the following Monday.

We were at this school in the middle of the 1970's. This was the time when most all the school's millage proposals were voted down. Whenever this happened, the South Lake Board of Education would raise the rent on us.

I went to a Board meeting and appealed to them to give us a break, because they were pricing us right out of the market. Their reply was: "We have been subsidizing groups like yours for years and can no longer do so."

In 1979, the Italian Cultural Center was located in an old church with four classrooms attached. The building was near Frazho Rd. and backed up to the Ford Expressway.

We approached them to see if we would be able to use their facilities. They were delighted to have us and at a rate much cheaper than the cost at South Lake. What's more, they included an empty classroom in the rear that we could use for storage. This was indeed a God send!

The place of course had no stage. Just a small alter area at one end. We eventually built some 4'x 8' platforms with folding legs which we bolted together to make a presentable stage. When the show was over they could be folded up and stored along with the flats.

Our five years at this location was some of our most enjoyable years. The only set back that I can recall was when we found that someone had broken into our storage room and taken all of our lights. Including a large follow spot. We were sure it was done by the C.E.R.T. kids that worked at the Center. There was, however, no way to prove it. Fortunately, our insurance covered the cost of the replacements.

In 1984, the Cultural Center itself felt that they needed more room. They then bought the abandoned Hickory Jr. High-school in the City of Warren. It was located near 12 Mile rd. and Hoover somewhat behind the St. John Macomb Hospital. They were able to purchase this beautiful 15 year old facility for about one million six hundred thousand. A mere pittance compared to the original cost.

When they moved, they asked us to join them. Since there was no affordable place in the Shores available and especially places with necessary storage area, we agreed.

The new building had a small, but adequate size stage. More importantly, across the hall from the stage was what originally had been the wood working shop. Next to it was what had been the metal shop. We were allowed to use these rooms for storage and construction. Between the two rooms was another small connecting room we could use to lock up our lights and other valuables.

Since the stage was only 10 feet high, it became necessary to alter all of our flats, which were 12 feet. While we were at it we decided to go along with Pat Sheehy's suggestion of letting him construct them with 1/4 inch plywood. This was a radical change from the old muslin covered flats. They were then put together with drywall screw instead of being laced together by rope. When the show was over, it was very simple to back the screws out then store the flats conveniently on top of each other. What's more, the flats proved to be more solid and didn't move or flap when the doors were slammed. They were also much

easier to paint. Finally, we found that acoustically, the sound was propelled better toward the audience.

As the Center began improving the facilities, they found they needed the rooms that we were occupying. First the little Café expanded into the metal working room. We were moved entirely into the wood working shop. A year or so later they decided to improve the wood working shop by making it an all purpose meeting room with a carpeted floor. This necessitated us being moved once more, this time to what had been the boys locker room. First we were allowed a small section of the area, but as time moved on we began taking over more and more of the space. Now we occupied over half of the area sharing it with the Country Dancing group and the Custodial repair shop. We have two rooms with locks where we store our lights, tools, props and our ever increasing supply of costumes. The rest unfortunately, is stored out in the open where anyone can help themselves if they so desired.

We have succeeded in having good relations with the Center since 1979. Maybe, at times we may have felt that we were discriminated against, but for the most part most of the rulings against us were truly justified on their part. No other organization in Warren or St. Clair Shores would be as accommodating as the Italian Cultural Center has been to us.

In June of 2004 the Italian Cultural Center sold their building and we were once again forced to pack up and move. This time we received a tip on a new location from a non-member who had read of our plight in the Macomb Daily Newspaper. She sent an email to our website encouraging us to contact her church which was in the process of completing a new multi-purpose center. Contact was made and soon after we had a new home at the Luther Center of the First English Ev. Lutheran Church in Grosse Pointe Woods.

Bringing People Together

The St. Clair Shores Players has been a wonderful means of bringing people together, to enjoy not only bringing live theater to the community, but forming life long friendships with like minded people who we would never have met otherwise. It has become apparent that once you have been involved in a play with complete strangers, it feels like you have known them for years when the play is finally over.

The St. Clair Shores Players have been an exciting group, attracting over the years nearly 2000 people as members. Many joined with the idea of acting in a play, but not all. Many members have no interest what so ever in acting, but relish the idea of being part of the backstage fun.

We are one of the few organizations where there is no age discrimination. Everyone connected with the show from 5 years old to 85, join together to promote the interest of the production.

Theater in itself is a word with a magic ring. It calls up a bright and exciting picture. It may be people streaming down the aisle of the auditorium. It may be the wonder hidden behind the folds of the front curtain. Or it may portray the hushed and eager audience, waiting for the house lights to dim. But, that magic also works its spell on the other side of the curtain, behind the footlights. Anyone who has ever been a part of this world knows the thrill of life backstage. No one can forget the excitement that mounts steadily until the moment when the stage manager finally signals, "*Curtain time!*"

Charter Members

August 1959

Kenny Revoir	Ione Newmann
Marylyn Revoir	Joan Nold
Mason Weaver	Pat Manor
Joan Weaver	Mary Armstrong
Peg Chickering	Art Armstrong
Don Chickering	Herma Lamia
Jim LaRose	Frank Lamia
Isabell LaRose	Henry Nold
Virginia Kesselring	Bob Ulrich
Don Moenart	Jackie Duemling
Dick Caruso	Fred Duemling
MaryAnne Caruso	Mimi Blackwell
Betty Parthemore	Harry Blackwell
Bill Houle	Henry Stone
Bonnie Gray	Marcia Lawson
Penny Aggas	Dorothy Koenig
Betty Virgona	Cliff Dulian
Mary Karlewski	JoAnne Dulian
Kay Owen	Ella Mae Lunt
Sally Schlager	Jeri O'Donnel
Jim Harwood	MaryAnn Moon
Gloria Lauderback	Harry Moon
Larry Lauderback	George Gaudy
Peggy Pressley	Elva McKean
Timmie Stahl	Glen McKean
Chris McPharland	Bernedia Allen
Frank O'Donnell	Alice Allen
Genevieve Harrison	Jim Carron

Plays we have performed over the years

Night of Jan. 16 (twice)	The Mouse Trap	My Three Angles
Once Upon a Mattress (twice)	Gramercy Ghost	The Devil's Disciple
Last of the Redhot Lovers (twice)	The Matchmaker	Lovers and Other Strangers
Come Blow Your Horn	Look Homeward Angels	Forty Carats
The Mouse Trap	Six Rooms, River view	Breath of Spring
Born Yesterday	Sweeney Todd (twice)	Pajama Game
Any Wednesday	Bus Stop (twice)	The Gazebo
Picnic (twice)	The Curious Savage	Wake Up, Darling
Our Town	Send Me No Flowers	See How They Run
The Tender Trap	Dial "M" for Murder	Goodbye Charlie
Wait Until Dark	Death of a Salesman	Social Security
Auntie Mame	Sunday in New York	U.T.B.U.
Love, Sex and the I.R.S.	The Tavern	Laura
Desperate Hours	I Remember Mama	Double Doors
Dirty Work at the Crossroads (twice)	Where's Charlie	The Boyfriend
Lily, Felon's Daughter (twice)	Girl Crazy	Guys and Dolls
Take Me Along	The Drunkard	Any Number Can Die (twice)
Aunt Samantha	A Thousand Clowns	Love Ride the Rails
Unexpected Guest	Seven Year Itch	Kiss or Make Up
Don't Drink the Water	Goodnight, Mrs. Puffin	Halfway up the Tree
Night Watch (twice)	Harvey (twice)	Alone Together
The Butler Did It	Dracula	Everybody Loves Opal
Lovers and Other Strangers	How the Other Half Loves	Look Homeward Angels
The Good Doctor	No Mother to Guide Her	Agatha Christie Made Me Do It
Never Too Late	Do It	Cat on a Hot Tin Roof
On the Bridge at Midnight	Rainmaker	No Opera at the Op'ry House
Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum	It was a Dark & Stormy Night	Arsenic and Old Lace
Second Time Around	Night Must Fall	Playing Doctor
Cactus Flower	The Solid Gold Cadillac	Deadwood Dick (twice)
Funny Valentines	Little Nell, Orphan Girl (twice)	Gold in Them Thar Hills
Heaven Can Wait	Curse of the Aching Heart	The Gingerbread Lady
You Can't Take it With You (twice)	Drop Dead	Office Hours
The Red Shoes	Dearly Departed	Land of the Dragon
Les Belle Soeures	The Other Cinderella You're a	Up the Down Staircase
	Good Man, Charlie Brown (twice)	
Something to Hide	Dark at the Top of the Stairs	While the Lights Were Out
Brecht on Brecht	California Suite	Teahouse of the August Moon
The Odd Couple (female version)	A Man for all Seasons	Life With Father
The Mouse that Roared	Little Women	Plaza Suite
Bull in a China Shop	Play it Again, Sam	Steel Magnolias
Blight Spirit	Perfect Timing	Flowers for Algernon
Because Our Hearts were Pure		

Not necessarily in the correct order

Past Presidents of the St. Clair Shores Players

Kenny Revoir
Richard Caruso
Les Wilson
Fred Duemling
Ann Maniscalco
Gloria Lauderback
Robert Mitchell
Sheila Dorling
Bruce Kile
Bill Dulaney
Patrick Sheehy
Luther (Ron) Gillispie
M. Wm. Bradley
Russel Korba
Chris Holwey
Ed Beckwell
Jim Fitzpatrick
Ellie Strong
Milt Hathaway
Charles Rowland
William DuRoss
Carol Sheehy
Dorothy Harrington
Carolyn Alexander
Randy Stewart
Kathy Stelma
Cindy Nicholson
Mark Sulewski

Interesting Footnote

An interesting aspect of theater is the fact that of all plays that have appeared on Broadway or off Broadway for that matter, most never really made a great deal of money at the time, for the authors. True, a few were great hits right from the start and were profitable, but the great majority weren't and most never even made it to the big time.

When their Broadway run is over however, the playwright usually makes contact with a play service such as Samuel French or Dramatist Play Service. (Two of the largest) The play is then released to the vast association of appreciative players in the world. They, of course, consist of Community Theater, College, High School, and Church Theater. This immense reservoir of people eagerly searching for plays to perform, are the backbone of the author's dreams. It is through this medium that the playwright finally gets his just rewards, as each group pays royalties to him for the privileges of performing his masterpiece.

Many plays that have been available for many years have made fortunes for their authors in this manner. Plays such as, "Our Town", "The Mousetrap", and, "Arsenic and Old Lace" have been performed by nearly every amateur group in North America.

WE'VE GOT OUR ACT TOGETHER!



Photo of Les Wilson by Matthew Sheehy

**THIS HISTORY OF
THE ST. CLAIR SHORES PLAYERS
WAS
RESEARCHED AND COMPILED BY
LES WILSON
2003**