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Noble Fool's new name celebrates ties to Fox Valley

What's in a name?

In the case of Noble Fool, to be re-christened Fox Valley Repertory in January, it's an expression of the commitment the onetime Chicago theater company has to the suburbs.

Noble Fool artistic director John Gawlik announced the name change Tuesday in conjunction with the company's 2011 season announcement. The new moniker reflects more than a cosmetic change, he said. It marks the evolution and growth of the company, in residence at St. Charles' Pheasant Run Resort for six years.

"The organization isn't changing, it's expanding," he said.

"I want people to think of this as their theater, where they come to share, remember, reflect and laugh."

Gawlik pointed to a proposed new works project to culminate in staged readings of new plays, as well as a three-week summer arts festival scheduled to debut in 2011. The company will also host occasional music and comedy shows as well as performances from its youth ensemble, made up of students from its performing arts academy.

The mission to educate, entertain and enlighten remains in place as does Noble Fool's long-standing focus on comedy.

The Noble Fool legacy "is still there and is still a part of what we do," Gawlik said, but the focus has shifted to encompass shows that have a bit more emotional depth.

The new name also underscores the bond the theater has established with its audience—which numbered more than 51,000 patrons last year, up from 25,000 in 2006—and with its community, Gawlik said.

That connection prompted next year's arts festival whose participants will include other St. Charles producers including Steel Beam Theatre, the Norris Cultural Arts Center and Arcada Theatre. As part of the festival, Fox Valley Repertory will produce two shows running in repertory over three weeks, Gawlik said. In addition, the company will also premiere several 10-minute plays during the festival as part of its Big Bang showcase.

This fall, the company inaugurates its new works project in which playwrights will collaborate with area scientists to explore how each perceives the world, resulting in a play to be premiered during next year's festival.

Also this fall, running under the Noble Fool name, is Gawlik's production of the comedy whodunit "Red Herring." It begins previews on Thursday, Sept. 2.

Ultimately, Fox Valley Repertory will produce theater that connects West suburban residents and speaks to their life experiences, Gawlik said.

"I want people to think of this as their theater, where they come to share, remember, reflect and laugh," he said.



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