

Thursday, February 3, 2011 | [Make kcchronicle.com your home page](#) | [Submit News](#) | [Subscribe](#)



7° Fair
[View local weather »](#)

Buy Your Favorite Football Munchies Here!
128 N. Main St.
Downtown Elburn
630.365.6461
Elburn Market, Inc.
100 Year Anniversary
Est. 1908

HOME NEWS SPORTS BUSINESS OPINION FEATURES MULTIMEDIA PHOTO STORE

EVENTS CALENDAR JOBS WHEELS REAL ESTATE CLASSIFIED

Site Web Search Web Search by **YAHOO!**

[Archive Search](#) | [Coupons](#) | [Planit Kane](#) | [Local Business Directory](#)

BLUE GOOSE HAPPENINGS & SAVINGS
Click for more Info
BLUE GOOSE MARKET
10 20 30

Created: Thursday, January 27, 2011 5:30 a.m. CST
Updated: Friday, January 28, 2011 10:32 a.m. CST

FONT SIZE: + -

Fox Valley Repertory maintains a legacy

By JOHN PUTERBAUGH - jputerbaugh@kcchronicle.com
[Comments](#) (No comments posted)

Audra Sybert, Brian Moline and 18 others recommend this. [Undo](#)

The year was 1964. St. Charles was a small town in the middle of cornfields, and the Chicago suburbs extended only to about Carol Stream.

People from Chicago and the near suburbs enjoyed vacationing in the little resort town. While much has changed since then, that is the St. Charles that Eric James remembers as a young man starring in some of the first shows to take place at Pheasant Run Resort's playhouse.

Carol Stohn Jr., a Chicago theatrical impresario who earlier had founded the successful Drury Lane Theatre, was charged by Pheasant Run ownership with the task of setting up a theater in St. Charles. Blending the star system – in which TV and movie stars would highlight Broadway shows rounded out by local actors – with a dinner-theater concept, Stohn laid the foundation for what today has evolved into the Fox Valley Repertory, which just this month changed its name from Noble Fool Theatricals.



John Gawlik, artistic director for Fox Valley Repertory, is pictured at the St. Charles theater. (Sandy Bressner - sbressner@kcchronicle.com)
[Buy Kane County Chronicle Photos »](#)

"There's such a tradition here," notes John Gawlik, Fox Valley Repertory's artistic director.

That tradition has grown and evolved just as the area around it has over the past decades. The theater's patronage has evolved from coming almost exclusively from Chicago and the early suburbs to those who live right here in what has become the Tri-Cities and immediate area. The theater has come to belong to and represent the local community, and the name change is just latest chapter in a long story of St. Charles entertainment.

"It's not just a name change," Gawlik said. "It really is kind of an overall mission change. It has become a major part of [local residents'] lives, and we're just embracing that."

History

James, now 68 and living in Danville, Ky., recalls with fondness and excitement the stories that occupy his memories of the original Pheasant Run Playhouse. Starting from scratch, he remembers the rough edges of productions there that Stohn eventually would smooth out.

"I remember the first couple shows, the curtain would go up and people would still be talking and eating," James said. "And then after about 20 minutes into the play, everything had calmed down ... so all that had to be worked out."

Technology – or lack thereof – offered other unique challenges.

"The stage manager was running around plugging and unplugging the lights that ran from extension cords to the kitchen," James said. "It was kind of set up by the seat of the pants."

James, himself from Westmont, and other Chicago-area actors shared a small, 13-foot stage with stars of the day such as Linda Darnell, Tab Hunter, Ida Lapino and Howard Duff, to name just a few.

Darnell, a movie star of the 1940s, made her final public performance at Pheasant Run. She died of injuries suffered in a fire at a friend's home in Glenview, one night after a Pheasant Run performance.

Hunter, a famous movie star of the 1950s, "was all for having fun," James said.

Whatever we were going to do, it had to be done. Otherwise, I'd be out of the show."



January 28-February 6
SAVINGS ON EVERYTHING!
KICK-OFF RETURN Sale
Furniture • Accessories • Paintings
Mirrors • Florals • Decor
Tailgate Party - Sunday, Feb. 6
STRAWFLOWER SHOP
210 W. STATE ST. GENEVA, IL
www.strawflowershop.com
10 20 30

Ads



US Doctors HATE Her:
Mom reveals secret \$5 method for erasing wrinkles...



\$5 Wrinkle Trick EXPOSED: Vernon Hills!
Be surprised when you see the results of a local mom's \$5 trick.



(CITY): Job Scams (EXPOSED)
We Investigated Work At Home Jobs And What We Found May Shock You...

James recalls one night when Hunter was playing games with him on stage one night, attempting to upstage him by moving farther back on the stage and thus requiring James to turn his head away from the audience to maintain eye contact during the performance. James adamantly defied him, never breaking his gaze with the audience. It was when he started to hear laughter from the audience that he realized something must be awry. Indeed, James' fly was open, and Hunter had simply been trying to alert him to it.

While the stories describe a group of ragtag local theater types, James said the theater really was set up for success.

"Immediately after Carl had set up the theater, it gained the same recognition that his former theater had, the Drury Lane," he said. "I mean it was a signature place, no doubt about it, right from the get-go."

Looking ahead

An oasis amid unspoiled farmland, James said no one ever imagined the suburbs would extend as far as they have, bringing with them a new clientele of local residents looking to enjoy theater at home in their community rather than traveling to Chicago for it.

Even in the five years Gawlik has been with the theater, the change is significant. Noble Fool Theatricals was doing five shows a year when he started, and today Fox Valley Repertory features a performing arts academy with 40-50 classes per year and 20-25 different types of performances each year. Yearly attendance also has doubled from 25,000 people to 50,000, Gawlik said.

"We were growing and through that growth we wanted to further define what we were doing this for ... we want to be your theater," Gawlik said.



Mama always says..

Start Now

Comments

TOTAL COMMENTS
0

There have been no comments made about this story.

[VIEW/ADD COMMENTS](#)



Copyright © 2011 Kane County Chronicle. All rights reserved. Published in St. Charles, Illinois, USA, by Shaw Suburban Media.

[Submit News](#) | [Subscriber Services](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Place a Classified Ad](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Editorial Principles](#) | [Feedback](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [About Us](#) | [Careers](#) | [Shaw Suburban Media](#) | [RSS](#) | [About Our Ads](#)

Kane County Chronicle on Facebook

[Like](#)

223 people like **Kane County Chronicle**.

Lori

Elyece

Michael

Emily

Len

Karen Keck

Sarah

Catherine

Kristin

Jamie

[Facebook social plugins](#)

READER POLL

How much time did you spend digging out your car after the blizzard?

- 1-15 minutes
- 16-30 minutes
- 31-60 minutes
- More than an hour
- I didn't drive after the storm

[Vote!](#) [Show results](#)

