

STAGE

"For nearly forty years, the volunteers of Starkville Community Theatre have spent countless hours of their free time putting on plays and musicals for local audiences, all for nothing more than serving their passion for art and entertaining others.

And applause. Applause never hurts.

SCT, as it's known by performers and patrons, sprang forth from a public interest meeting in 1978. With notice published here in the Starkville Daily News, planners expected a tiny turnout of artists and passively interested looky-loos. Instead, around 50 people showed up to voice their support for the idea of a new organization that would stage plays in and for our community.

A small troupe of non-professional enthusiasts took shape. In their off hours, professors, doctors, lawyers, and more learned how to build set pieces and memorized lines of dialogue.

There was no permanent home for the group, with shows finding temporary stages in old storefronts, campus auditoriums, and hotel ballrooms.

Set walls and staircases were built off-site in garages and fellowship halls then transported across town a few days before each show. Performers would often mime opening windows and doorways until only a day before the show, and rehearsals couldn't account for last-minute obstacles like large furniture pieces or hastily strung lighting cables.

Once, when performing, ironically, "The Rainmaker" at an old ag center, the show had to pause until a storm stopped loudly pelting the metal roof.

The roadshow lifestyle of the troupe worked through the 1980s, with two or three productions per year consistently selling well wherever and whenever they popped up. Even without a permanent home, SCT had already far surpassed the average lifespan of a community theatre.

Almost two decades after its formation, SCT had the opportunity to take root on Main Street when the building for the old Katz dress shop became available. The storefront was three stories of department retail space, including an office mezzanine level – one of the first structural touchstones to be removed and remodeled as SCT created its auditorium.

When the first show debuted in the new space in



Gabe Smith

February 1996, there was no elevated stage, no permanent seating on the audience risers, and an extremely small second-floor dressing room that could only be accessed by performers willing to shimmy up and down a vertical ladder.

On opening night, the heating unit for the building was broken, leaving patrons and performers fighting the winter

weather. Audience members packed the stands of folding chairs despite the cold, sharing blankets to stay warm.

Audience loyalty has always been there for us, and to this day, we maintain a passionate and generous base of season-ticket subscribers, donors, and sponsors – a luxury that not every arts organization enjoys. With consistent ticket sales and a place to hang our hats, we expanded.

Our season grew from three shows to eight, with summer fundraisers and award-winning competitive shows for state festivals. Our building got an expansion, with much-needed storage and backstage space, while improved lighting equipment, speakers, and software brought us closer to technical modernity. New programs highlighted original work from area writers and added youth into the mix with children's workshops.

In 2015, SCT took another leap forward, hiring its first-ever employee – a chief administrative officer. That's where I come in.

As a fifteen-year volunteer at SCT, I'd acted, directed, stage managed, served on committees, and seen dozens of shows as an audience member, and I'm honored to have my new position and am newly excited about its possibilities every single day.

"Community" is the bedrock of our theatre family, and, with your help, it will continue to be.

I urge you to check out a show if you never have. We want you to come see what we do, and we believe our enthusiasm can be infectious.

If you love the arts, we have so many opportunities to volunteer, from handing out programs to running lights to sewing costumes to auditioning.