

# CONTINUING THE HISTORY OF SOMERS VILLAGE PLAYERS GETTING CAUGHT UP!

Founding member Malcolm Chadbourne wrote the history of the first twenty-five years. I continued along the same lines for the next fifteen years. Now the Players are celebrating 50 years – a good time to catch up again. One item that wasn't determined in time for the last memories: Scholarships for 2010 were awarded to Paul Lietz and Sam Plotkin. Here we go again! This is what I have noted down. Hopefully nothing important was forgotten!

Shirley Warner Historian

## 2011 (Our 40<sup>th</sup> year!)

The winter of 2011 was tough. Heavy snowfalls caused roofs and barns to collapse. Our Millpond roof was leaking. Fran & Ben Bugden shoveled off the shed roof for fear it would collapse and Easter weekend the roof over the kitchen area really sprung leaks. Rain poured in. Our contract with French Builders to replace the shingles had yet to be signed, but Greg French came in the rain & put a tarp on for us. As soon as possible, the roof was replaced at a cost of over \$9,000. Later the kitchen ceiling was repaired by Mike Eldridge, who also repainted both ceiling and walls in the kitchen and back hall. Mike did it for no pay. Thanks!

On Halloween, a freak snowstorm downed many trees leaving the town without electricity for days and weeks. The massive clean-up continued in November as we held a party commemorating our forty years, but the turnout was small.

The town began work on a streetscape in Somersville. The area was upgraded with sidewalks, plantings and streetlights. There was also enough grant money to re-side our (town owned) Millpond building and our shed, refurbish porches, paint exterior doors and blacktop the surrounding parking.

ARSENIC & OLD LACE was presented at Joanna's in the spring as a tribute to our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Gus Rousseau directed and the show was done entirely in black & white. Shirley Warner and Wendy Peterson played the aunts; marking Shirley's return to the VP stage after 20 years. Mal Chadbourne (VP Charter Member) also appeared as a visitor soon to be victim – He had played Teddy in the VP 1977 production. The second play to be re-done was THE CURIOUS SAVAGE, directed by Dorrie Mitchell in the fall. Both plays aged well, and were well received by audiences.

2011 Scholarships: Michael Hornig, Brianna Bagley, Alexander Crowell, Mary Elizabeth DiProto

## 2012

The year of the Somers fires. Jan 1<sup>st</sup> the Somers Congregational Church burned to the ground and the Somersville mill was destroyed by fire in June. Both were suspicious. The mill fire did not affect our building, but certainly changed the look of the area.

Clean-up was finally done in the back shed room! Storage shelves were purchased to help with organization in the costume/prop room. Wendy Peterson, assisted by Diane Preble, took responsibility for planting flowers near the building. We ordered a sign from the tech dept. of the high school. By the time it was constructed and we contacted the Town for permission to install, the Town was not inclined to allow the sign. We are working on that!

In May we gave out the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Awards for (1) *Most Prestigious Player*..Justin Martin (2) *From Behind the Curtain*.. Sue Moak & (3) *Thespian & Beyond*.. John Lepore. In addition, a number of humorous awards were presented.

Our summer picnic was held at Worthington Pond. Wendy Peterson did not have Children's Workshops this summer – After 25 years, she needed a break!

MOON OVER BUFFALO (directed by Shirley Warner) was a big hit in the spring. This comedy also brought in some new members. During MOON, our electrical system showed its age. The group agreed to look into new equipment and pay for a dedicated line at Joanna's. Gus Rousseau directed a relatively new show, BECKY'S NEW CAR (2010), for the fall dinner theatre. It was very well received, and our audience seemed to appreciate seeing a new play. We were in touch with the couple that had commissioned it as a gift to the wife. The four-part set was a challenge on our small stage, and with our limited lighting. However, we managed to pull it off quite successfully!

Kathy Welch and Wendy Peterson brought forth a proposal for a new children/youth venture in the summer. Called the SVP Pied Piper Productions, the first show would be held at Worthington Pond in August and the first production would be *Suessical!*, which is designed for youth. The membership agreed to fund this new opportunity, with the hope that it would pay for itself. Kathy and Wendy will produce and direct.

In December we presented the Radio Play version of *It's a Wonderful Life* for the Cultural Commission at the Piedmont Percolator. A large, diverse cast read the parts in front of radio mikes and others made the sound effects a'la the 1940's.

Scholarships: Kellsey Kaplan, Cali Russell, Jacqueline Schober. None of these students were Somers residents, so the membership reconsidered the qualifications and decided that at least one scholarship should be awarded to a Somers resident each year.

## 2013

Our spring show, THE LADIES MAN, offered several challenges: Six doors with lots of running in and out, and period costumes. The set worked beautifully, thanks to Justin Martin and Frank Aguas, and looked even more beautiful. Director Shirley Warner staged the running with consideration to stage limitations – and the out of breath actors made it work. Joyce Benson researched, borrowed and made gorgeous costumes. It was big hit with audiences, and we had good houses. PLAY ON! was staged in the fall, directed by Gus Rousseau. Another top-notch set design by Franc Aguas. The play-in-progress within a play drew plenty of laughs, but our audiences were smaller. However, we exceeded our budget profit expectations.

Because of difficulty with move-in/move-out, the membership agreed to spend over \$13,000 to purchase portable staging to be used at Joanna's. First used for *Play On!*, all agreed it was a good investment, and the moves in and out were much easier.

*Suessical!*, the first production by VP Pied Piper Productions, was successful- even showing a profit! The first night was chased inside the MBA gym by rain, but two Saturday performances were staged outside at Worthington Pond. This could be the beginning of something!

Cultural Commission Piedmont Percolator: We presented a play by former VP member, *The Women of Appalachia*. It is a series of stories about these women, but not a comedy and perhaps this was not the audience to appreciate it.

The sign outside 55 School St. was finally approved and went up! It was constructed by students at SHS. The building looks very attractive with the plantings maintained by Wendy Peterson. Spring clean-up got the windows washed and the inside cleaned.

Vice-President Kathy Welch established the VP Facebook page and posts pictures and comments about our shows and our members. We also signed up for PayPal, so patrons can purchase tickets on line through our web site. After 42 years, we're going tech. We have Justin Martin to thank for his work setting up and maintaining everything!

Attendance at meetings has improved and having programs more often might be helping. Betsy McGuire presented a one act she had written in January. A friend of Betty Domer presented her one act in March. Dana Samborski brought puppets he created and demonstrated them in May. Once again we held our August picnic meeting at Worthington Pond.

Awards were given at a pot luck supper/meeting in May. (1) *Most Prestigious Player*..Shirley Warner (2) *From Behind the Curtain* Cheryl Zdebski & (3) *Thespian & Beyond* Sherry Samborski, along with humorous awards.

Scholarships: Matthew Della Camera, Mark Ceppetelli, Sarah McCollum and Angelique Bacha were our high school senior scholarship winners, and the membership also agreed to give an additional scholarship to Dana Samborski, who is pursuing his Masters in puppetry at UConn. We surprised Dana with a presentation at the final spring dinner-theatre production. Total scholarships: \$3500.00

## 2014-15

For the spring dinner theatre we reprised an old favorite: *THE FOREIGNER* by Larry Shue. It was fun to revisit and restage this popular comedy. Directed by Dorrie Mitchell

Awards given in May were: – Most Prestigious Player, Gus Rousseau – From Behind the Curtain, Kathy Welch & Wendy Peterson – Dee Moak, Thespian & Beyond

Scholarship awards were given at a reception after the May meeting... Vanessa Knowlton, Cali Russell, Dana Samborski & Molly Stone were each awarded \$1,000 – Dana shared his puppet creations with us.

Pied Piper Productions staged another summer show; *Beauty & the Beast, Jr.* All performances were able to be held outdoors at Worthington Pond. The show gave opportunities to a lot of young people and even made a profit. Shortly thereafter, and without notice, Kathy Welch surprised the VP by establishing a new theatre group (SRO) to do future youth theatre. The Players attempted to maintain an educational youth element with a summer “camp” for theatre and music. Although plans were well underway, the Director accepted a job opportunity in Texas and the program had to be cancelled. We hope to have another educational opportunity in the future, if someone steps up to direct the program.

I'M CONNECTICUT was our fall show. Playwright Mike Reiss gave us permission to do this new play. Ours was only the third time the show had been staged. It was written for UConn and first produced there. This show gave us the opportunity to try something different. The playwright even attended two shows and held talk backs with the audience. Directed by David Crowell, the show was full of laughs and well received.

Our February Piedmont Coffeehouse production of scenes from *Twigs* was dealt a blow by the weather. In the midst of one of the snowiest winters ever, it was postponed once, and played to 12 people on the second try!

*THE PSYCHIC* was our spring dinner theatre show. Erin Chaffee made her directing debut with this ‘sort of’ murder mystery. We also ran an audience survey during the run of this show, trying to determine audience preferences. Cheryl Zdebski organized a ‘2<sup>nd</sup> chance drawing’ for a gift basket to benefit our scholarship. As it was successful, we will probably continue the idea.

A Spring workshop on Directing was held by Shirley Warner, and we did a Millpond clean-up: David Crowell power-washed the outside. We even had the ‘cellar’ cleaned out and a lock put on the hatch door.

Dee Moak lost her battle with breathing problems this summer. She will be missed – a good friend and tireless worker.

2015 Scholarship winners were: Mark Ceppetelli, Kayleigh Droney, Abigail Golec, and Stella Rivera.

### 2015-16

This fall the group decided to do a musical for the first time since we have been producing shows at Joanna's. (Our last musical was at Aya Po in 2008 - *Cole*) A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE FORUM was directed by Gus Rousseau, with music direction by Ben Mabrey and we had two back up musicians for the shows. Three sponsors helped fund this show (at \$500 each) and we had good audiences. After many years, we raised our ticket price to \$40. We bought an electronic piano and black drapes with poles for stage and side curtains to be used the first time on this show.

*A Christmas Carol*, a staged reading held in the Blake Room at Somers Public Library in December was directed by Ryan Bird, who also wrote the adaptation. Many non-VP readers were in the large group. It was beautifully done!

For Piedmont Coffee House we presented *All the Kings Women*, a staged reading of a play about Elvis. It was a big hit!

Our spring show was PROOF– directed by Shirley Warner. Franc Argus did the set and won an award for it. Well deserved! We took a chance on staging a drama at dinner theatre. It was well received, but not a financial success. Combined with the extra expenses for the musical, we ended the year with a deficit in the annual budget for the first time in many years. Fortunately, we have healthy savings. And, once again, we improved our tech capabilities and purchased a new board with led lights, at a cost of nearly \$9,000. It was certainly time for us to upgrade our 30+ year old lights.

VP Awards in May were given out: Most Prestigious, Christine Zdebski – From Behind the Curtain, Dawn Bird – Thespian & Beyond, Stephanie Zdebski,

We heard of the death of two former members: Jim Anthony and Marianne Myracle. Both were active in the early days of the Players. And we lost long time member John Moak – actor, Aya Po chef, party giver, and friend.

2016 Scholarship winners: Abigail Golec (Tolland), Michael Schober (Somers), Olivia Weber (Ellington). Each received \$1,000.

### **2016-17**

The fall production, DON'T DRESS FOR DINNER (directed by Gus Rousseau) saw the addition of a matinee performance on the middle Sunday. It seemed to be a welcome addition, and we will continue to offer it at the same price and with the same meal. We will also continue to offer a discounted price for Opening Night, as this has proved the most difficult to meet our 50 person minimum with Joanna's. Time will tell if it is worthwhile.

We were not asked to do anything for the Cultural Commission at Piedmont Hall this season. (note: we were never asked back. The Cultural Commission decided to only do musical programming.)

Angela Taylor made her debut as Director for THE FOX ON THE FAIRWAY in the spring. This rollicking play had the audiences involved. Casting one of the male actors proved difficult, but a good fit was found.

Scholarship letters were sent to more schools in a wider area. We had 16 applicants and the committee felt there were five outstanding candidates. Membership approved awarding \$5000 total, so each student received \$1,000. They were: Jared Bakum (Wilbraham), Christopher Perrone (Vernon), Taylor Rose Mickens (Springfield), Dan Kelly (East Longmeadow) & Valerie Barbosa, who received the Dee & John Moak award given to a Somers resident. The scholarships were given out at a reception held prior to our May meeting.

We gave up our safety deposit box and purchased a fireproof strong box to keep at Millpond.

VP Awards in May – Most Prestigious, Angela Taylor – From Behind the Curtain, Darlene & John Creed –Thespian & Beyond, Regina Erpenbeck.

### **2017-18**

Our fall show was THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST with Angela Taylor stepping up to direct. This classic was not as popular with audiences as we hoped. While it is important for the group to have a classic now and then and was a good experience, it hurt us at the box office. The spring show was A MOTHER, A DAUGHTER AND A GUN. Christine Zdebski directed for the first time. There were mixed feelings about this show and once again audiences were low. We also tried a non-meal performance at a reduced price hoping to expand our audience base. It was not successful, and won't be offered again. The season left our bank account low as well. We used most of our savings account and prepared to tap into investments.

We were still able to award three scholarships. Most of our scholarship funds are specifically designated for that purpose. Jake Regulbuto (Somers), Stephani Bauduccio (Ludlow, MA), and Aimee Meunier (Broad Brook, CT). The awards were made at an Open House in June.

Major changes were made to our By-Laws during the year. Officers and Committee Chairs were changed to two-year terms with staggered election years for Executive Board members. Some duties were combined, decreasing the number of positions. Even so, filling all positions proved a challenge. To begin the new fiscal year we lacked a Housing Chair and Program Chair. The Executive Board will fill the gap for now. The group also began to work toward having plays scheduled further in advance and holding auditions earlier. A used table saw was purchased for set building.

VP awards were not given out, as it was felt that we were just recycling them through the same small membership. We defiantly need new members!

### **2018-19**

We had an Open House in June, but the attendees were VP members or associates. That did not match our goal of attracting new members. Board members took on the job of providing some kind of entertainment after each meeting in an attempt to make the meetings "fun". Those who attend meetings seem to enjoy it. However there were not many attendees!

We did another musical in the fall –THE LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS- directed by Gus Rousseau. Ben Mabrey did musical direction and secured back up musicians again. The difficult puppets needed for this show were beautifully made by Franc Aguas. Other difficulties with the show seemed to be more of the personality conflict type, which regrettably affected the morale of the group.

In the spring we staged a relatively new show, OVER THE RIVER AND THROUGH THE WOODS, with a new director David Cohn. We offered a matinee on the middle Sunday, and eliminated that Friday performance. It seems to be the right decision.

Scholarships: The John Dee Moak award went to Sarah M. Uyar (Somers). Other awards went to Seamus Butcher (Hampden, MA), Emily Weber (Monson, MA) and Chris Perrone (a rising junior from Vernon who will be studying in London during his junior year). Awards were presented at a reception at Millpond.

### 2019-2020

Our spring production was STEEL MAGNOLIAS, which was first done by the Players at Aya Po in 1991. There was one cast member from the first production in the show. Lee Anne Madersky took the role of the mayor's wife this time around. She had played M'Lynn in 1991. The director, Jeffery Flood, was new to the VP as were several cast members.

Storage at Millpond continues to evolve. We took out a permit to put a door in the north end of the costume room to facilitate moving flats etc. in and out. It has yet to be installed. We also did a lot of sorting and purging of costumes, thanks to several members coming in for many hours. There is still work to be done when the door gets installed.

Scholarships: Three young women were selected: Dee & John Moak award: Amari O'Connor (Somers High)- Caitlyn Corsetti (Broad Brook),- Sarah Uyar (University of Harford) note: Tessa Sanville of Ellington decided to postpone her college enrollment (due to pandemic) and her award was not given. We encouraged her to let us know when she will be attending school.

The SRO group went defunct, and gave over \$5,000 to the VP for scholarships.

**Then came the Pandemic!** The production of *I Hate Hamlet* was ready. Actors and director were fine tuning the show. Sets were painted, costumes fitted, props set, road signs printed and Franc Aguas made a wonderful suit of armor for the stage. (Out of cardboard! What a talent!) We were ready to move to Joanna's over the weekend. At our monthly meeting the previous Wednesday, the group made the difficult decision to cancel the show. It turned out to be the right decision. The corona virus shut down the State and the country, and took many lives. We isolated and masked up. In June we held an outdoor meeting where we could space ourselves apart. We still did not have a full slate of officers to vote upon. Although short staffed, the Board held a couple of meetings during the pandemic. However, we did not try to stage any events. Our plan, and hope, was to hold a 50<sup>th</sup> year celebration in early 2021 and stage *I Hate Hamlet* in the fall. Then came another obstacle. The Liptons will not re-open the banquet hall. Their outdoor venue during the pandemic proved to be so successful that they will continue it and offer live music weekends. The VP was left with a show and no place to stage it. There is still a capacity limit for restaurants and other venues. At this writing we are investigating how, when, and where the Somers Village Players might continue. .... Call it..... INTERMISSION!!

A sad note: Betty Domer attended the June meeting, but not long after was diagnosed with cancer and we lost her. There have been many former members that are not named in this history who are no longer with us. They all have helped keep the Village Players viable. In Betty's and their memories this writer hopes it continues.

LISTING OF OFFICERS

<i>Season</i>	<i>President</i>	<i>Vice President</i>	<i>Secretary</i>	<i>Treasurer</i>
11/12	Gus Rousseau Other Exec. Bd. Members	Diane Preble Justin Martin	Sue Moak Sherry Samborski Shirley Warner	David Crowell
12/13	Gus Rousseau Other Exec. Bd. Members	Diane Preble Justin Martin	Sue Moak Sherry Samborski Shirley Warner	David Crowell
13/14	Gus Rousseau Other Exec. Bd. Members	Kathy Welch Justin Martin	Pat Covino Cheryl Zdebski Shirley Warner/John Lepore	Diane Preble
14/15	Shirley Warner Other Exec. Bd. Members	Gus Rousseau Justin Martin	Pat Covino Cheryl Zdebski David Crowell	John Lepore
15/16	Shirley Warner Other Exec. Bd. Members	Gus Rousseau Justin Martin	Regina Erpenbeck Erin Chaffee David Crowell	John Lepore
16/17	David Crowell Other Exec. Bd. Members	Justin Martin Erin Chaffee	Regina Erpenbeck Gus Rousseau (note: Regina also served as Membership)	Shirley Warner
17/18	David Crowell Other Exec. Bd. Members	Justin Martin Erin Chaffee	Regina Erpenbeck Sherry Samborski	Shirley Warner
18/19	David Crowell Other Exec. Bd. Members	Justin Martin Erin Chaffee (Tech)	Regina Erpenbeck	Shirley Warner
19/2020	David Crowell Other Exec. Bd. Members	Justin Martin Erin Chaffee (Tech)	Regina Erpenbeck Shirley Warner (Housing)	John Lepore
20/2021	David Crowell Other Exec. Bd. Members	not filled Regina Erpenbeck	Stephanie Zdebski Shirley Warner	John Lepore