

## Theater stays away from glitz, glitter

*Small-capacity Omaha venue features only original plays*

By DANELL MCCOY  
Staff writer

Tucked away from the hustle and bustle of Omaha's night life is a small, intimate theater that caters to local playwrights, actors, directors and producers.

For the past five years, the Shelterbelt Theatre, 33rd and California streets, has worked to promote the talents of locals, and in the process has created a niche for itself in Omaha's art scene.

The Shelterbelt was founded just a few years ago by Scott Working, an Omaha playwright. In 1993, the hopeful writer took his script to a local coffee shop and lounge called Kilgore's and asked the manager if he had ever thought of putting on a play there.

Piquing the owner's interest, Working was allowed to produce his play, titled "V Of Geese," with the help of Alicia Dunn, L. Scott Blankenship and Ken Jacobs. With this production, the Shelterbelt Theatre was founded.

The theater's name comes from the long rows of trees that protect farmhouses from wind and storms.

"In the same way, our theater protects local actors and writers," said Don Nguyen, Marketing and Public Relation at the theater. "We want to keep it a safe place for them to come and act or produce their works. It's a shelter for theater artists."



DAVID SINDELAR, left, and Mike Christensen rehearse "We Don't Serve Mexicans" at the Shelterbelt Theatre at 3225½ California St. in Omaha. The theater showcases original productions in front of small audiences. SCOTT MCCLURG/DN

This is what Working had in mind when he founded the theater. He wanted a place where actors and directors could get away from the confines of modern theaters and work in a less restrictive atmosphere.

"This theater has such a down-home type of environment," said Christa Miller, assistant artistic

director at the theater. "Anyone is welcome and it can be such a good learning experience."

The self-supporting theater prides itself on being one of a few all-original, all-developmental theaters in the state of Nebraska.

It strives to present an alternative to the mainstream productions by entertaining, involving and engag-

ing audiences with its shows.

"We have a very relaxed atmosphere," Nguyen said. "Don't expect high professional values. We don't have excessive props or thousand-dollar costumes. We just try to entertain people."

Miller agrees. "Our shows are not about the set, lights or props. Our shows are so

character-driven and are more about the words and the emotion."

By putting on shows that are purely theatrical, focusing on the actor's voices and facial expressions instead of on the props, the audience is able to connect with the characters instead of feeling as though they are

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MATT HANEY/DN

# When I was your age...

*Storyteller brings together generations*

By DIANE BRODERICK  
Staff writer

In the mid-1970s, Duane Hutchinson realized what kind of power his storytelling held.

He was called to tell stories at a YMCA camp, one with 50 white children and 50 black children, with the goal to try and ease racial tension prevalent at the time. When he arrived for the assignment, he said he was kind of scared to go in.

"I could hear the yelling and screaming and pounding a block away. It was wild."

"I got hold of one kid and started to tell a ghost story to him. Little by little, the kids who were racing back and forth through the building came over and lis-



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tened to ghost stories."

When he left, the camp personnel thanked him at the door, and they said it was the first time all weekend they'd had an hour of quiet.

For about 20 years, after retiring as an on-campus chaplain, Hutchinson, 69, has been putting that power to work, visiting schools - from kindergarten through college - giving storytelling seminars.

With fairy tales, ghost stories and more advanced literary fare such as

works by Leo Tolstoy, Hutchinson reaches toward youth with guidance.

He doesn't just tell stories - he teaches children to find them in their own lives and learn them, so the tales can bring them a source of confidence.

Hutchinson says he is happy to see a current trend in many schools, one that shows children how to reach into the most rich source of stories - history - to become mini-experts on certain subjects. This allows the children to begin to speak with conviction, something that is very important.

"(Children) just get so scared standing in front of people, whispering instead of speaking out," Hutchinson says, "But when students become masters on one historical figure, they speak

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