

## Brief history of Magic Circle Players

Bette Dustin Spiro surprised her friends that summer day, 1959, when she announced, "We're going to do a play!" In August the troupe performed *Green Grow the Lilacs* at the new National Guard Armory, corner of Townsend Avenue and South 12th Street, which was to be one of many venues for half a century.

Magic Circle Players (MCP) took its name from early tourist literature, according Gerree Nash, one of the founding mothers of the group. "Montrose has always been surrounded by such beautiful land. People would come and visit and go see places like Telluride, Ridgway, Ouray, Grand Mesa and Gunnison. Montrose was in the middle of what was called 'the Magic Circle of Beauty.' so we thought that would be a good name for the theatre."

Volunteers make the magic happen, whether on the main stage, in costumes, backstage crew, tech booth, ushers, anything and everything having to do with putting together a production. Over 200 plays and 49 years of continuous performances later, Magic Circle is one of a handful of community theatres still in business.

All was not without challenges, however. In the 1970s attendance at plays and enthusiasm languished. Some thought the end was near. Then *South Pacific* took center stage in March, 1980, and MCP was born again.

From the Armory, to the old Arcadia Ballroom, to the old junior high gym, all gone now, MCP set up chairs, moved sets, hauled props, and entertained theatre-goers of the region. Operettas were staged at the Montrose Pavilion, a courtroom drama at the courthouse downtown, and one play was performed at the Lions Clubhouse.

Several shows were taken "on the road" to Ouray, and *Guys and Dolls* was performed in Christchurch, England, in May, 1999, in an exchange program with their local community theatre.

The current theatre, 420 South 12th Street, was built in 1974. Fund-raising is underway for a new theatre, which would increase storage room, including "fly" for sets, dressing room space, and enlarge bathrooms, among other improvements. MCP plans to keep the current theatre for rehearsals, to handle smaller productions, and for rental income.

In March, 2000, Magic Circle Players received the Governor's Award for Excellence in the Arts. The proclamation declared, "Magic Circle Players' contribution to the arts through high quality, often sold-out, theatre presentations have made them the pride of the community."

MCP was recognized for its volunteers, its ownership and maintenance of its facility, for its accommodation and shared expertise with schools and local non-profit organizations, and for its involvement of youth in volunteer activities and summer workshops.

Today, Magic Circle Players stage five main plays--a mix of comedy, drama, and musicals--and hosts children's theatre and workshops.

From 9-year old Paige McCracken's debut in *Cinderella* (May, 2009) to 83-year old veteran Gerree Nash (most recently in *Harvey* (May, 2008)), Magic Circle Players Community Theatre has had a place for everyone.

"It's a hoot," according to Gerree.