

# *Thanks For The Memories*

CELEBRATING 60 YEARS OF LIVE THEATER (1948-2007)  
50 YEARS IN OUR BUILDING (1957-2007)



## The Fire As A Beginning

It was the fire on May 16, 1956, opening night of The Fifth Season, which brought about the deaths of two members, consumed the improved Gowen Field theater building, and served as the focal point—the impetus for the present day Boise Little Theater.

The fire exploded. “It blew. Fire went out of every opening ten to twenty feet...that’s when a person dies in a fire because it sucks the oxygen out of your lungs.”

*DON MUMMERT*



Don and Jody Mummert, soon to be married, were in the audience that May night and recalled how Vaughn Price noticed the smoke and flame above stage left (the paper said Don Bish was one of the first to see it), stood up, and asked the audience to move out slowly. (Vaughn shook the curtain and Don thought it was dust coming out. But it was smoke.) The 300 people in the building, with help from two or three ushers, were out in approximately 30 seconds with no panic. It is believed that Don

McKean went onto the stage to look for his wife while Justice Craycroft sought to save the valuable furs. They both perished in the fire. Don Mummert went on to direct twenty-eight plus plays, act in too many to count, do every job in the theater, and be the backbone of BLT.

“We were stunned by the tragedy, and resigned to the loss of all we had worked toward,” said then president, **Sheridan Gill**. He estimated the loss to be \$15,000 not counting the valuable clothing from several local stores.



*Gowen Field Theater with work crew*

“My first memory of Boise Little Theater is actually a rather dark one. I remember peeking through a doorway into a building with not much of a roof left, beams lying askew from ceiling to floor all crinkly looking, black and still smoldering and dripping from the water the firemen had poured over it the night before. The floor was a puddle of standing black water with chairs sticking up.” *JOANNA MARSHALL*





“We sat behind the theater and we were just stunned. We couldn’t believe what we were seeing. . . We didn’t know the two men were dead, but we suspected it because we couldn’t find them in the group. We had a meeting to decide what we were going to do. Was this the end of us?” *BETHEL MARSHALL*

The fire, after all, caused the construction of our present-day facility, the fifty year old, round, domed-shaped playhouse, unique in its time, that is responsible for the survival of our sixty year community theater. Local businesses and volunteers got together and in just a year and a half built something that might not have happened and guaranteed the future of BLT.

“After the big fire, there was only a figurative moment until the membership got its breath. . . Then its right hand began work toward a new building and its left hand kept producing plays . . . but in the Boise High School auditorium.” (*THE IDAHO SUNDAY STATESMAN*, July 3, 1960)

The fire united the membership and galvanized the community for the goal of establishing a new theater. Art Troutner, soon to be principal in Trus Joist, volunteered to design and oversee construction of the unique dome, framed by the largest unsupported laminated,

curved beams to be used at that time. His brother Paul headed up the few construction workers and theater volunteers did many of the jobs under their supervision.



*BLT's 1st production in the new building, High Tor directed by John Fairchild*

*Cast of High Tor*





**Betty Joanna (B.J.) Jefferson** recalls everyone working together. “Working together building this building, made us feel comfortable with each other. It didn’t matter their stations in life. If they did what they said they would do, they were friends.” Work made people close—in plays or working parties.

Betty and daughters Janet Lizaso and Anne Church, worked on the construction and cemented their long term involvement at BLT. Today’s theater was not built all at once, but continued throughout the years. “Mr. Langroise wanted to put up a flagpole in memory of his son, Bill, but Jim Branson talked him into expanding the entire lobby.”

The mortgage on the new building was only \$15,000 which was retired with a ceremonial burning of the mortgage at the annual picnic on July 14, 1960 at fire-

place #1 Municipal park. In the next few years, new seats (\$11,802) and a lighting system (\$14,265) were installed, the green room, wardrobe, and workshop (\$10,423) were added, and a circular stage (\$1,642), paving the driveway, and curtains (\$3500) were paid for along with other improvements, all by 1966 when the 100th play was performed.

## We Owe A Debt

Yes, we owe much to the pioneers who created and grew Boise Little Theater. Mildred Selby, the children’s librarian at Boise Public Library, Mrs. Frank Maler, a minister’s wife, and Harold Wennstrom, speech and drama teacher at Boise Junior College met in February, 1948, to establish an outlet for creative arts.



The original 1948 steering committee were: Grant Ambrose, chair, Hugh Hough, organizational chair, Mrs. Roy Maxey, secretary, Art Letourneau, Mrs. Lester Randolph, Joe Maggio, Leonard Abrams, Mrs. John Hawkes, Mrs. Fritz Hummel, Louis Pacheco, Mr. and Mrs. Art Mazola, Mrs. Willis Sullivan, Mrs. Elizabeth Williams, Mrs. F.M. Marler, Lumir Gerner, Mrs. Harry Marsh, Mrs. Robert Hamersley, Harold Wennstrom, Frank Parcher, and John Voulkos.

We want to remember all the people who contributed to the theater, but cannot mention everyone as even individual shows required deep dedication and hard work to present to our audiences. With apologies to those unsung heroes maybe we can picture a few over the years who represent the backbone of our 60 year old company.



*The Women 1952*

Vicki Patterson's first role was in *The Women* along with 64 other women!



*The crew: John Scott, Paul Moehlman, Vaughn Price, Don Bush, John Fairchild, Ev Jefferson, Ed Siebert and two others*

## How We Got Involved



Many stories are told about how people get involved with BLT. The most frequent is that a member recruits someone to be in a play.

**Jay Sherlock** was parking his car in front of the Boise Hotel (Hoff building) 1958-59 when a stranger asked Jay to lend him a nickel for the parking meter. When Jay did, the man invited him into the hotel restaurant where he could treat him to a cup of coffee. Jim Branson soon found out that Jay had been a member of the Pasadena Playhouse. He convinced Jay, who had burned out on theater (Yeah, right!) to read a play that they needed a director for. Jay read the very funny play and was hooked. Then Jim dropped a bomb on him, that they had a director for that one but needed one for *Laura*. Jay was committed and directed *Laura* in 1960. Jay went on to direct some fourteen shows, act in many others, and be awarded four Beulahs.

**John and Ruth Scott** moved to Boise in 1949 when he was transferred here by Hartford Insurance. Ruth, who had some experience with theater, saw a notice of auditions for a play at BLT. While she was reading, Vaughn Price asked John



what his talent was. “Buying tickets,” was John’s reply. Vaughn didn’t stop there and found that John had experience in the Coast Guard as an engineer. His knowledge of electronics got him thoroughly involved and within two years, he became BLT’s fourth president! Today, people still are captured this way.



**Nancy Richards** was born in Boston, and worked as a receptionist for the Boston Theater Management Company as one of her first jobs. In 1956, Nancy and husband Monty lived in Lewiston, and she was cast in *Good bye My Fancy* for the community theater in Lewiston. Monty was transferred to Boise soon after. Nancy, not to be deterred, then tried out and was cast in *Sabrina Fair* at BLT! In addition to acting and assistant directing, she worked on almost every play for many years, doing lighting, props, sound, prompting, set building—wherever she was needed. Nancy won a Beulah for *The Heiress* 1956 and today is local theater’s biggest fan, rarely missing any performance.



Multi-Beulah winning actress **Nancy Suiter** calls herself in earlier days “every director’s first second choice,” and cites several examples to support her premise including: *How the Other Half Loves*, (1976), in which she won a Beulah, *Four on a Garden* (1979), and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*,

(1979). In the 2006 production of *On Golden Pond*, for which Nancy won her latest of several Beulah’s, she reached “actor’s Nirvana – existing in another character’s skin as naturally as in one’s own.”

She met husband Clarence “Clancy” on the set of *The Crucible* in 1960. Clancy was assistant director to Vaughn Price, and also played Reverend Hale. Clancy passed on his most important basics of good stagecraft: “(1) pick up your cues, (2) the meaning and importance of stage business, and (3) how to move your body on stage and look like you are actually going somewhere.”



Sadly, a grand person and a fine actress, **Pat Patterson** passed away Sunday, November 11, 2007. Pat was not only a polished professional on stage. She was a sweet person, fun to be around, and thoughtful of all she with whom she interacted. Pat once wrote of John Woodworth that he had

“that indefinable quality that cannot be learned or taught or communicated, that fantastic charisma that flows across a stage and wraps itself around each person in the audience.” The same can be said of her—right back at you, Pat! She is pictured with her four Beulahs, *Speaking Of Murder* 1956, *Summer And Smoke* 1967, *Antigone* 1970, and *Lion In Winter* 1972. We miss her at BLT.

**Nancy Shankweiler** and her husband **Bill** came to BLT in 1957 when Bill acted in *Reclining Figure* and she did props. Nancy met Bill as they attended the Goodman Theater in Chicago and Bill was hired to teach at B.S.U. As talented and well liked as Bill was, Nancy held her



own acting and directing. Bill was cast as Oscar in *The Odd Couple* and Jay Sherlock as Felix, a choice many thought was backward, but it was a huge success. Nancy won awards for her directing *The Corn Is Green* and *The Miracle Worker*. Pam Abas and Michael Hoffman were in *The Corn Is Green*, Pam winning the Beulah and Michael going on to be a Rhodes Scholar, imitating the young man in the play. She says she has been very fortunate over the years in getting the right people. Elizabeth Streviff was another who played Helen Keller in *The Miracle Worker*. Nancy recognizes good talent and has a smooth, warm way of working with her cast.



*How the Other Half Loves 1976  
Top to bottom: Karen Gabica, J. Richard Garland,  
Pat Patterson, Mike Rogers, Nancy Suiter, Pat Ryan,  
Mike Silva, and Kay Doty*

Rogers in *How The Other Half Loves*, directed by Mike Silva assisted by Kay Stowell (Doty). This was the play that kept Pat coming back to the theater as the experience was sweet. Capacity audiences who howled with laughter made for success and the fine actors he worked with showed him what comic timing was all about.

In 1972, Pat Ryan was teaching English at Capital High School when fellow teacher John Sherod came into his classroom to ask if he had ever been in a play. They needed a Caliph of Baghdad for *Sinbad The Sailor*, the children's Christmas show. That December saw a record cold spell when the high for the Sunday matinee was -5 degrees.

But it was 1976 when he was honored to play with Nancy Suiter, Pat Patterson, Karen Gabica, J. Garland, and Mike



Marie Blanchard has the distinction of serving as Boise Little Theater's first woman president (1976-77.) With professional talents as a marketing specialist and nurse, and with "amateur" talents as long time actress and singer, a majority of the nearly 200 theater members saw Marie as the most logical choice for the president's role. She worked hard at keeping the lines of communication open between

the board of the little theater and its members, and with the community at large. The women who came after Marie as president (1976-77) often cite her presidency as a role model and as an example to follow. Her acting and singing career was ongoing during her leadership, before and after, as she cited her on-stage involvement in over 30 productions at BLT and with other theater groups.

When Sue Howe came to Boise in the early 80s, "I had no friends. So I looked in the phone book and there was Boise Little Theater. I had come from twenty years of theater in California. I called BLT and got Dorothy Mousetis." Dorothy invited her to the meeting on Monday night. She soon was in *Ten Little Indians* 1983 and did the costumes as well. Sue had worked at The Pasadena Playhouse and brought talent and skill to our theater and received her first Beulah for *Dinner At Eight* 1984. She did five Opals and brought the house down when she used tea bags hanging from a clothes line.





## Oh, Those Funny Things That Happen!

No remembrances about theater happen without the recall of funny things that occur during performances. We all know what comes about when a phone doesn't ring, a doorbell doesn't chime, or someone misses an entrance.



**John Kirk** remembers his acting with Nancy Wanless (Suiter) when his son, sitting in the audience, said very loudly for all to hear, "Mom, he kissed her!" He could hardly contain himself to go on with the scene. But, he says, these are the things that make live theater so much fun to do.

**Merle L. Huntley**, business manager at the time of the fire, was in *Sabrina Fair* (1957), playing against Beverly Strike and Pat Numbers (Patterson) when he switched the nouns in his line, "In America, all rabbits are named Peter." The cast and audience were laughing so loud that the curtain was pulled and opened later on the next scene.



*Dennis and Charlie*

**Charlie Wilson**, a funny guy who won a Beulah for his lead in *No Time For Sergeants* (1968), was Standing off stage with his friend Dennis Samer ready to enter together

when he engaged Dennis in conversation about how he was feeling. "Well, you look good," said Charlie. And then just as they started to enter, Charlie said, "You're not a very good actor, though."

Director **Cricket Langworthy's** heart almost stopped when in the middle of *Come Blow Your Horn* (2005), the apartment door became stuck. Characters could not enter and stood shouting through the closed door! They quickly improvised, however, and came in through the kitchen, covering their entrances by professing that they entered through the back door of the apartment.



**Gloria Salladay** remembers something concerning ticket sales when she was box office chair. The season's tickets arrived with the rows assigned, "A" in the back and "O" as front row. (I wondered how that happened!) There was no time or money to reprint. So she redid the seating charts and they painted the seat letters to match the tickets. (We changed these back a few years ago.)

*Stalag 17* had a couple of funny things happen. In the middle of act I one night, someone went up on his line and because several men were on stage at that time, no one knew where they were in the script. Silence prevailed for a long time. A new assistant stage manager believed the scene was over and pulled the curtain. Director John Kirk ran onto the stage and told the cast, “Stay in your places; we’ll open the curtain and go on.” The curtain opened and the cast was still at sea. Finally, someone gave a line that came from somewhere in the future and the cast took it from there.



**Ginnie Ison** was the assistant director on *Stalag 17* and experienced her first time on stage. A group of POW’s would walk on each evening and the guys got the idea to dress Ginnie as one of the extras. To finish off her disguise, they gave her a cigarette to dangle out of her mouth. (She didn’t smoke.) “So on stage I went—surrounded by the other guys—a surprise to the “prisoners” on stage. But **Jay Longeteig** grinned and came over and lit my cigarette.”



*Longeteig before and after in The Desperate Hours, Nov 2007*



**Kay Doty**, for years our resident historian, loves BLT even more than her beloved Yankees and her little dog. She saw her first stage play, other than high school, at BLT in 1961, *The Hollow*, when she and her husband were given dress rehearsal tickets from George Jay. “I was just enthused beyond belief. This was wonderful.” She became a member and has stayed involved to the present day. Twenty-seven years after she saw *The Gazebo* 1961, she directed it in 1988. In the first, Don Milne starred, and in the second, his son Don Hawkins played the role. She said it “took four men and a boy” to move the circular stage, it made noise, and the audience could hear an occasional swear word!”

**Diane Benedict**—In May, 1990, during *I’ll Leave It To You*, directed by Barbara Beautrow, the characters completed the play holding candles and interjecting comments after the power went out all over east Boise. “The audience didn’t want to leave, and really got into it, roaring with laughter over each ad lib. To date, that has been my most unusual experience on the stage.” Diane has worn several hats over the years, being a board member, serving as a house manager with husband, Earl, and working on the nominating and script committees. Earl has also built sets, served as stage manager, and was elected to the BLT board. Both Benedicts cite their association with the Boise Little Theater as an experience that has enriched their lives.





Vicki Patterson's first experience at BLT in *The Women* 1952 proved to be instructive when, as a young girl, she learned about the facts of life while listening as the 65 women in the cast "talked about the things women talked about back stage." Vicki says that the first thing an actor should do is "learn your lines!" She was hooked on acting and loves nothing better than being on stage. "I love walking on that stage and seeing the curtain open." Work-

ing with people to achieve a goal is rewarding, but being on the stage relating a story to the audience is the bonus for work done. Vicki has worked with two of the best directors at BLT, Keith Patterson and Don Hawkins.

It's hard to think of Shirley Lake without hearing her famous laugh. Her good humor is only surpassed by her fine acting. "The first play I attended at BLT, *Jay Sherlock* was in it. He made the show come alive and I thought, 'What I wouldn't give to be able to do that.'" Well, Shirley did in many roles, in *Bad Year For Tomatoes* 1991 or *Those Crazy Ladies In The House On The Corner* 2004 which had her "laughing for weeks" as "that's pure enjoyment." Shirley has been on the board, worked backstage many times, and delighted audiences on stage.



Ever evolving, in the last seven years, we have a new heating and air conditioning system, new carpet in the theater, a major stage lighting upgrade, the seats refurbished, auditorium painted, a new main drape, new carpet and paint for the green room area, new flats, and now a second dressing room. Soon we plan to have a further upgrade on the stage lighting and a new stage floor.

*Credits for brochure:*

Cover photos: Kevin Butler  
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 Brochure layout: Karen A. Smith

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Refreshments .....	Barbara Beautrow	Capital Building Fund.....	Joe Posluszny



Joe and Helen Posluszny, past presidents, she for two years and he for four. Joe moved the theater forward with significant improvements that were carried out during the six years they were presidents. New theater carpet, new stage lighting system, refurbished seats, flat construction, and more were realized. Joe's great strength was his initiative and ability to get the volunteers

working. Helen was able to be successful because she has a pleasant personality and genuine concern for everyone.



The 60th season started off with a winner when **John Myers** directed six special women in *Steel Magnolias*. Pictured here are three fine actresses who played their parts above and beyond. Left to right are: Sue Galligan, a woman who has won several Beulahs for her work and always delights the audience; Patricia O'Hara who brought the audience to tears in her role as the mother who has lost her daughter; and Susan LaFond who was absolutely delightful as the scatter-brain who talks some sense.

John Myers has directed several memorable shows as one of the savvy directors now working at BLT. He did the reprise of *How The Other Half Loves* 1996, *A Few Good Men* 2001, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* 2003, *A Christmas Carol* 2004, and *Til Death Do Us Part* 2007. Each of these shows were a credit to the theater, complete and well done.



The 2007-2008 BLT Board of Directors: Top-Barbara Beautrow, Jim Koepl, John Myers, Joanna Marshall. Bottom-Autumn Haynes, Pat Ryan bus. Mgr), Wendy Koepl (president), and Connie Behee (secretary)