

Sunrise Theater scheduled to perform at Behrend

A talented group with a serious message

by Danette Parrett
Features Editor

Sunrise Theater, an interdenominational Christian theater troupe of 22 young people aged 13-19 will perform at Behrend, Saturday, Feb. 27. The free performance will begin at 7 p.m. in the Reed Lecture Hall. The event is sponsored by Campus Ministry.

Sunrise theater is based in Enon Valley, PA. Its founder, Ruth Brandt, started the theater ministry in her barn as a memorial to her husband.

Tiffany Smith, a eighth semester political science major, is Brandt's granddaughter and a student at Behrend. She explains how the theater began and its focus.

"First of all, Sunrise Ministry

"I know that God is not the most popular among students here on campus, but the group has a great message."

was established. There was no theater. Then my brother decided to follow his dream and direct a small play in our barn. He moved a couple of hay bales around, swept the floors of the barn, left a few mice homeless, and directed a small play with family and community members being the cast. This was the commencement of the Sunrise Theater."

As the years passed, the equipment became more technical and the cast became larger. Now, a stage is present, complete with colored overhead lights, two full spotlights, a fog machine, curtains on a metal rod (replacing two white sheets sewn together and placed on a cord). In fact, the hay and straw that once carpeted the floor of the barn no longer reside in the barn at all. It has been replaced by a sound tower equipped with all the technical sound equipment. There is a men's dressing room and a women's dressing room decorated with multiple mirrors and lights. There is a props room, costume room, and prayer room--where the cast warms up vocally and then joins in prayer before a performance.) In other words, the upstairs of the barn has all the essential equipment for raising pigs, horses and cows.

Sunrise Theater has three main objectives:

1. To encourage and facilitate personal, spiritual growth in the life of each person who participates in the shows.
2. To clearly present the gospel of Christ through high quality shows.
3. Encourage those believers

brother's, not Sunrise Theater's."

The program was created from Tim's interest in theater. All through school he had performed in every play and musical available. Tiffany recalls Tim's homemade performances for their grandfather.

"Tim would arrange plays for my sister, myself, and my

volunteering at a youth detention center, and she realized how many youth were in need of help and love. Her grandmother had the aspirations of building a youth home because she wished to help those youth who were hurt or disadvantaged. Tiffany's grandmother had mentioned the idea of a youth home to her

When the youth home is finally constructed, it will be named the Ray B. Brandt Memorial Home in honor of Tiffany's grandfather.

During Tiffany's stay at Penn State-Beaver campus, she performed with the group. Tiffany enjoyed performing with them.

"Performing with the group enabled me to do my most favorite things: share the love of my life, God, with other people, and singing!"

"After all the songs are memorized, you are able to concentrate on what the message you are sharing with the audience. So many times whenever I was facing hardship of some sort, the words of a song we were singing would slap me in the face and teach me some invaluable lesson God wanted me

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Lights, camera, action: Sunrise Theater Players are scheduled to perform *Elijah* and *Room 77* on Feb. 27.

who see our program and even challenge them to a deeper, more meaningful commitment to Christ.

Tim Smith, the founder, is consequently the director. He has performances during the summer months. Last summer, he had three productions with each production showing for two weekends. We have turned a portion of one of our garages into a concession stand where popcorn, nachos, lollipops, coffee, etc., are served.

During the winter months, it is difficult to heat the barn for a comfortable environment, so Tim developed a traveling group. This is the first year he has had two performances on alternating weekends. The purpose is to give the cast members a break. Each would ideally have an obligation only once every other weekend.

The major focus of the group is God. Tiffany states, "It is He who has enabled the group to get this far. He is the One responsible for the group's success. All productions have a Christian influence or message. All glory is in His name, not my

brother to put on. He would write out programs and invite relatives and friends. He once wrote a play entitled, "Work I hate," and [we] performed it for the family. It was humorous because my Grandfather Brandt was a very stern man who was adamantly convinced he had grandchildren to work on the farm. We hated it as Tim's play pointed out in his not so subtle manner. My grandfather was furious."

Every performance has a "love offering" or a donation. From the money collected, 10% goes to a fund for building a youth home.

The theater is a two-fold ministry. It ministers to those who hear the performance through the message it conveys and it also generates funds to help in building the youth home.

Tiffany's grandfather was the reason that her grandmother decided to build the youth home. Her grandfather was emotionally troubled during his youth, and he grew into an emotionally troubled man. Tiffany's grandmother realized the the Lord could carry so many burdens and heal hurt emotions. After

grandfather before he died, but he commented that there wasn't enough room on their farm for it. Tiffany said her grandmother didn't give up hope.

"My grandmother knew that this home was part of God's plan and that with or without my grandfather, God's plan would take place."

Sometime later, Tiffany's grandfather fell from the roof cleaning the gutters and met his death. At the funeral, people were asked instead of giving flowers, to give donations, and thus, the Sunrise Ministry began.

Tiffany finds that John 12:24 is claimed in conjunction with her father's death.

"It reads, 'Most assuredly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls, into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain.' The significance is that my grandfather did just that. He fell to the ground and died. Through his death, more people have been reached than if he were still alive. Please do not get me wrong. It was very painful [when he died.] We just try and see the good from it."

to hear."

Tiffany encourages all students to attend the performance to be held at Behrend on Feb. 27.

"I know God is not the most popular among students here on campus, but the group has a great message. It isn't like going to church and hearing someone tell you that you are going to hell unless you do this or say that. It challenges both the Christian and non-Christian. It isn't 'preachy.' Let me say again that it is not 'preachy.' *Room 77* is more subtle in its message and is applicable to all ages. The other is the story of *Elijah*, the prophet who conveys the truth of the power of prayer."

To see the music and drama with a message of Jesus Christ, come and see Sunrise Theater's performance. Two 40-minute musicals will be presented during the group's Erie appearance. The first, a drama called *Room 77*, tells the story of one special room at Sycamore High School. *Room 77* will be followed by the all-vocal performance *Elijah*.

Sunrise Theater's performance is free and open to the public. Refreshments will be served. For more information contact Campus Ministry at 898-6245.