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He's made all the world his stage

Leah Stacy

John Barthelmes of Fairport left his comfortable, full-time job as a software engineer in 2005 to pursue his dream job as the owner and artistic director of Spotlight Studios for the Performing Arts.

Four years later, the studio is steadily growing and 36-year-old Barthelmes loves what he is doing.

Barthelmes' latest production with the Fairport studio, *The Secret Life of Girls*, tackled issues facing girls in their early teens, including eating disorders, gossip and peer pressure.

The show received such positive feedback that it will return in September to perform for area Girl Scout troops.

Aside from his work with the studio, Barthelmes works with five summer theater camps, directs musicals at several area schools, teaches four acting classes at St. John Fisher College and performs with improv comedy troupes, Nuts and Bolts and Joey and Maria's Comedy Wedding.

Why did you choose this career?

All throughout high school and college I was continually subconsciously telling myself, "when I become a teacher" It just took me a while to listen to what my subconscious was telling me for years.

Performing has always been a passion of mine (since kindergarten, when I played a giraffe that helped a little girl locate her dog lost in the zoo). I couldn't think of a better way to make a living.

What kinds of challenges does your industry face?

Financial and budget cutbacks. When the economy is in a downturn or budgets are tight, art of any kind is usually the first to go, even in personal or family budgets. The challenge is how to create a quality product (be it a performance or a class) yet still make it affordable to the audience or the student.

What's been your biggest career hurdle?

I've had to be a self-starter in almost every aspect of my career. You can't just look online or in the newspaper looking for gigs doing what I do when you're starting out. You can't join a company to do this.

I've had to make connections with different schools, community theater groups and recreation departments. I make the initial connection, build the relationship, build the trust and follow through on commitments to create repeat gigs.

Who were some of your mentors?

Mary Krickmire of Fairport, who was the first theater person I connected with in Rochester, and Michael Bernet, who was my high school drama director.

What advice have you gotten in the past that has helped guide your career?

When I was in the process of making the difficult decision to give up my comfortable, high-paying software engineering job to take on teaching/directing theater full time, I found the following quote, which I keep in my wallet as a reminder to keep going: "If I fail, I fail ... but then it was because I wasn't good enough, not because I didn't have the guts."

How do you spend a day off?

On days off, which are rare, I like to work out, bike along the canal or go see other theatre performances.

Leah Stacy is a freelancer from Rochester.

Additional Facts

John C. Barthelmes

Artistic director, Spotlight Studios for the Performing Arts

Age: 36

Residence: Fairport

Education: Bachelor's in computer science/mathematics from State University College at Fredonia.
