

**Special Newsletter in Honor of Graham Thatcher**



Jeff Kingsbury & Graham, publicity shot for *A Couple of Blaguards* (2015); Graham & Anna Marie, 70th BHP Reunion (2015)

Supporting the Black Hills Playhouse in South Dakota's Scenic Custer State Park • Founded by Warren M. "Doc" Lee in 1946 and Associated with the College of Fine Arts at the University of South Dakota

# Black Hills Playhouse

## Alumni Association Newsletter

Summer 2018



### BHPAA President's Message

The BHPAA and BHP family was saddened by the loss of Graham Thatcher on 31 May. He was a giant in the history of the BHP and South Dakota theatre. The loss of this amazing artist is a tough one to all of us who were touched by his mentorship, generosity and spirit. His impact on the BHP and those he performed with is widespread and will endure. This issue of the newsletter celebrates and honors his life and artistic legacy. Check out the [bhpa.org/events](http://bhpa.org/events) website for Memorial information and pictures regarding the 9 July event honoring Graham, held in Rapid City at the Performing Arts Center. You'll also find pictures, a video link, and a summary from son Jim Haberman of the Hap Haberman memorial event held at the BHP on 27 May. Both events were wonderful tributes to these incredible BHP theatre artists.

The BHPAA has three dominant goals and responsibilities – 1) Support the BHP, 2) Connect BHP Alums and, 3) Collect and preserve BHP history. Supporting the BHP has been the bread and butter of the BHPAA since its inception and has an impressive list of achievements: Haberman Hall, the new Grand Drape, the Dennis Holub Limelight Fund's lighting equipment purchase in conjunction with the 70<sup>th</sup> reunion, and this year's Dining Hall and Microphone fundraising effort, to name a few. Connecting Alumni and preserving history is a newer BHPAA focus that will be realized with the recently created, and ongoing construction of the [bhpa.org](http://bhpa.org) website. As website capabilities increase, Alumni assistance is needed in an effort to extend its connection reach with the addition of historical pictures and documents provided by you! Thoughts, recommendations, and/or submissions can be sent to [markmeersman@aol.com](mailto:markmeersman@aol.com) or [joannlambertz@hotmail.com](mailto:joannlambertz@hotmail.com).

Thank you!

The BHPAA and BHP Alums were a HUGE help in supporting the BHP's fundraising drive this year to recondition the Dining Hall via the Dining Hall 2.0 and Microphone project – THANK YOU for your generous support! The goal of expanding seating via a covered wrap-around porch, upgrading the kitchen's food preparation equipment, and purchasing new microphones to upgrade theatre sound capability was impressive. When the final list of donors and total dollar amount raised is available, we will get that published and on the website. We want everyone to have a chance at acknowledging the incredible support that BHP Alums and BHP supporters provided. We do have an expected short distance to go to complete the entire fundraising effort. The BHP and BHPAA are partnering and brainstorming the final push this fall to close out this fundraising effort, so stay tuned! Finally, take a look at the dining hall porch pictures in this newsletter and on the [bhpa.org](http://bhpa.org) website. The company is incredibly appreciative!

It has been a great 2018/73<sup>rd</sup> BHP Season so far. Thank you to all BHP company and staff, BHPAA and BHP board members. It is an honor and privilege to serve with fellow Alums and BHP supporters who are committed to the current and future success of the Playhouse. It is important and necessary to South Dakota and to the professional theatre community.

Many thanks for your support of the BHP and BHPAA!

Mark Meersman  
BHPAA President (BHP 1987-1993)

### Website Updates

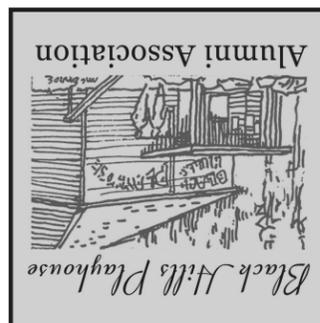
**Bhpaa.org**

#### New Additions:

- Graham Thatcher Memorial info, video link, and pictures
- Hap Haberman Memorial info, video link, and pictures
- 2018 BHP company scrapbook capability
- 2018 & 2017 Extra Mile Award info and pictures
- 2015 70th Reunion pictures

#### Coming Soon:

- Season by season info webpages (playbills, company rosters, production info, season scrapbook with picture uploading capability)
- BHPAA project info and pictures
- Address, email gathering and updating capability
- Stay tuned and check it out!



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## BHP Executive Director Update

### BHP Update August 2018, Linda Anderson

Greetings to alums far and near and thank you for all of your support of the BHP! Hard to believe, but we are getting ready to shut down campus on Sunday after a glorious season of theatre - there are many great things to report.

The 2018 Company is delightful and has done such a great job. I really enjoy getting to work with these creative professionals who bring the shows to life each season. My role as executive director is transitioning to more off campus work as the company has grown. I spend a great deal of time working in the Park during start up and shut down, and am at the BHP multiple times during the week, but much of the work I do in the day-to-day is in Rapid City where it is simply easier to do accounting, program planning and administrative work with better technology and a bit of quiet. I do miss the interaction of the day-to-day with the great and creative people in the company. However, Artistic Director Dan Workman and our Company Manager Jen Luke have done a fantastic job keeping the gears turning during the season.

### Dining Hall 2.0, Barber Shop Reno & Beautification

Thanks to many generous donations from BHP alums, the BHPAA and BHP boards, funders such as First Interstate Bank and funders to our Gimme Shelter matching campaign, the Dining Hall project is almost finished. In June, the SD National Guard provided labor for this project to build the beautiful covered porch and we have purchased \$10,000 worth of new commercial kitchen equipment for the kitchen.

Huge thanks also to Gene Fennell for his donated design of the porch which truly expands seating for the company and provides excellent shelter. The porch really adds to the aesthetic of the building and is a beautiful space for the company to hang out and relax as well, right next to the campfire circle and garden recreation area which was donated by alum Jeff Kingsbury. Special shout out to alums Jeff Kingsbury and Ingrid Reuter for getting First Interstate Bank on board for funding! Working together we make beautiful things happen for the BHP.

Each year, the BHP Board tours the shops and hears suggestions from the company regarding needs. Thanks to a design by Sandy Dickenson (mom of Company Manager Jen Luke), and labor from the SD National Guard, we were able to bring a suggestion of painters Terra Writz and Shelby Marsh to life this summer. A new door and set of stairs was built into the side of the scene shop, allowing direct access to water and the costume shop. This has improved safety in the building and workflow for the painters. And, last fall, the electrical load and

capacity to use tools was improved significantly when the board approved a project suggested by the Scene Shop team, Chris Haug, Billy Osos, and John Utter.

Our campus is incredibly green and beautiful this year thanks to Jeff Kingsbury, the Custer Mile High Garden Club, donations of plants by Gregson's Gardens and lots of rain. Jeff has added many additional flower beds with twinkling solar lights and other features which patrons and company are really enjoying. Jeff is employed as our gardener, but has donated a lot of equipment, time and flowers to the effort of making the campus beautiful.

### Camps

Camps are becoming a big deal for the BHP Education Program headed by the Director of Education, Deb Workman. Camp Bravo, our partnership camp with the LifeScape Center for the Arts at Joy Ranch near Watertown, had 40 kids with and without disabilities participating. Our performing arts camps for kids entering grades 5 – 7 followed by the camp for kids entering 8th – 12<sup>th</sup> grades were learning experiences for the company as we learn how to accommodate higher numbers and settle on the right format to make them most successful.

This year, 79 kids participated in the two camps and they had wonderful experiences! Held at Placerville Camp, 12 miles west of Rapid City, they included regular camp activities (hiking, campfires, etc.) combined with performing arts training, performances at the Hill City High School Theater, and field trips to the BHP which allowed kids to attend a performance and meet the professionals. Attendance for camps has continued to double every year with kids coming to the Black Hills from all over the region.

We are grateful for the many people (including many alums), arts councils (Custer & Beresford!) and companies who have come forward with tuition assistance which made it possible for kids from families of all economic income levels to attend.

### Drum Roll, Please: Announcing the 2019 Season, 74<sup>th</sup> Season of the BHP

Sherwood: The Adventures of Robin Hood - June 14 - 30

Side Show - July 5 - 21

Mamma Mia - July 26 - August 11

Steel Magnolias - August 16-25

As the 73<sup>rd</sup> Season closes, we begin almost immediately working on the 74<sup>th</sup>! So close to that 75<sup>th</sup> milestone! Look for more info and we hope you'll make plans to come see us next summer or connect with us in the off season.

Best wishes, Linda



New Dining Hall Porch, June 2018

See more pix at [bhpa.org](http://bhpa.org)



## In the Spotlight

### Eric Johnson

(71-72,74-75,77-79,  
91-2006,13,16,18)

**How did you end up at the BHP your first summer and why did you decide to come back?**

I was a freshman at USD and everyone was talking about the Black Hills Playhouse – I had never been there, but it sounded like great fun. So, I applied and had an interview with Doc Lee. I got accepted and so began my journey with BHP. Lynn Lohr and caravanned out from the middle of the state. I arrived just in time to meet Daamen Krall and begin clipping the grass around the rocks at the front of the theatre. The ‘good times’ just kept on coming. I had a work-study assignment to run the dishwasher every meal for the entire season. Then the auditions began, and we were off and running.

Every spring ‘Playhouse Fever’ struck and I kept coming back – forgetting the tough stuff and cherishing the joy, the friends, the shows, the dorms, the bathhouse, Marguerite, Marjorie the Nurse, and on and on. It was beautiful, and the work was hard as heck! I got some lucky roles that first summer. It was love at first sight.

**What do you remember most about your time at the BHP or your most favorite memory?**

The friendships, the great shows, the not so great shows, dipping my toe into tech theatre, and memorizing lines and lines and lines. Can't forget the Ham – sometimes even green. Then there were the directors, Doc and Evie, Lenny Anderson, Jan and Jill, Linda and the Workmans – the memories just flood back some more public – some more private. It fills my heart.

**What impact has the BHP had on you/your life?**

The most important thing: I became fearless – I had more experience so that when I started auditioning in NYC, I was actually prepared – scared but prepared. And who helped me – BHP Alums.

**How would you answer this question for our Alums: ‘Why BHPAA?’**

WHY? We have a responsibility to share this beautiful theatre home in the hills with the world. Stay connected and be a driving force – ‘make believe’ can become the real stuff. Give the ‘young ‘uns’ the same glorious days rehearsing, working, chilling in the creek, and making the deepest friendships they will ever cherish.



### Steve Hinkle

(1987-93,95)

**How did you end up at the BHP your first summer and why did you decide to come back?**

My last year at Augustana College there was an audition for the Playhouse at the college. I think John Wylie organized it. I had nothing planned for the summer and was applying to Graduate School and decided to audition. I believe Lenny Anderson was the playhouse reprehensive at the audition. John Wylie said it would be a great experience and would help prepare me for Graduate school (John you were right). I also learned that USD was looking for Grad Student at the audition. To make a long story short I went to USD and got my MFA in directing. I came back for the next nine summers. I love working with all the talented directors, designers, musicians, and actors from across the country. The beautiful Black Hills still call me every spring.

**What do you remember most about your time at the BHP or your most favorite memory?**

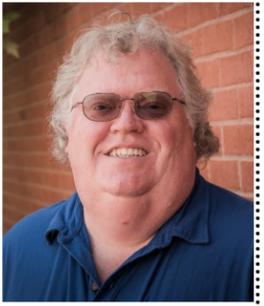
What I remember most is the passion everyone had to create the best production possible. Sixty or so individuals working together to create some of the best theatre I have had the privilege to participate in. The budgets were not large and the conditions could be difficult, forest fires, 100 degree plus temps, hail, snow, and lack of sleep but none of these stopped the production. I have way too many favorite memories to pick just one.

**What impact has the BHP had on you/your life?**

Without the BHP experience I would not be as successful as I have been. I learned and practiced my skills with some of the best people in the theatre industry. I learned that you don't need a lot of money to create beautiful theatre. I have been a one person theatre department for 22 years and a day does not go by that I don't use what I learned at the Playhouse.

**How would you answer this question for our Alums: ‘Why BHPAA?’**

If not us, who? Those of us who have benefitted from our Playhouse experience need to support the BHP. Supporting the BHPAA is a great way to help.



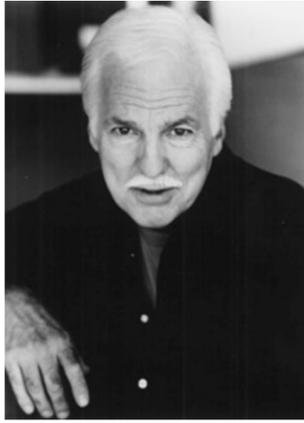
### Keep It Going

Tax-deductible contributions—large or small—help with ongoing costs such as newsletter mailings, eblasts, and BHPAA annual events. Checks may be sent to: BHP Alumni Association, Attn: Jo Wohlenberg, Treasurer  
P.O. Box 74, Yankton, SD 57078

### New Address?

If your address has changed, or if you would like to receive eblasts from the BHPAA, email [markmeersman@aol.com](mailto:markmeersman@aol.com)

## Remembering Graham Thatcher



RAPID CITY, SD. After a final curtain call, Neil Graham Thatcher exited this earthly stage on May 31, 2018. He was born in 1939 in Sioux Falls, SD and raised in Kensington, CA near Berkeley, to a mother involved in community theatre and a father who was an opera singer and choir conductor. He received his first make up kit when he was five, thus beginning a lifetime in the theatre. He directed or performed in more than 200 community and professional theatre productions around the country and appeared in numerous films and commercials. His longest running role was as loving husband to Anna Marie, whom he met at the Black Hills Playhouse in 1968. Self described as a "happy guy," his mantra was "Carpe Diem" and he fully appreciated every day.

Graham was a man of words who loved language. He authored *I Know What I Like: Everyone's Guide to the Arts*, numerous philosophical essays and many memorable letters to the editor. He was also a playwright and authored several plays, including three in which he performed as Clarence Darrow, Sir Thomas More and Justice William O. Douglas. He cofounded Periaktos Productions with his wife and business partner to use theatre as a teaching tool in Continuing Legal Education. From 1992 to 2016 they presented their "CLE Theatre" programs on ethics in the practice of law to all parts of the country.

While he was a most memorable actor, whether in the classroom, on the stage, in a business boardroom or in a social setting, Graham Thatcher was, at his core, a teacher. And for that he will be best remembered. A gentle and humble soul, he wanted no resume as an obituary. He was never one to "toot his own horn." Others had to do it for him and they did, in life and in his passing. Henry Adams said, "A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops." In the notes after his passing, it is evident that Graham's presence has affected eternity, and his students, friends and colleagues now write his legacy.

*"Graham was my very first vocal production coach for the stage. He taught me so much on and off the boards. Much of which, I use in my theatre classes today. I will miss your muse, your wit, your grace and your never-ending support. May your celestial journey be filled with rogue and peasant slaves, greasepaint, footlights and infinite applause ... until we meet again, my friend."*

*"Graham was my friend, my mentor and a huge influence in my career. His spirit will be with me always."*

*"A special man who impacted so many will be remembered for helping them understand anything is achievable with imagination and commitment. Lucky to have known him. Better for having learned from him. Honored to always remember him."*

*"Graham's confidence in me and my abilities and my opinions gave me confidence to take on challenges I might otherwise not have taken. ... I am grateful for Graham's impact on my life."*

*"He was bold, gifted, opinionated, honest, intelligent and such an incredible actor and director. His life was varied and amazing from teaching to professional acting to spending his later years teaching lawyers and others to be better communicators. ... My heart is heavy for ... the loss of this great person whose spirit will remain with us forever. You will find, much to Graham's surprise, how very many people were influenced, inspired and encouraged by him. His reach and impact was enormous in so many ways."*

Although not a religious man in a traditional sense, Graham was a deeply spiritual being and believed that we are all connected in spirit. He fully believed that we are all stardust and William Shakespeare's writing from *Romeo and Juliet* provides an appropriate epitaph:

*"When he shall die,  
Take him and cut him out in little stars,  
And he will make the face of heaven so fine  
That all the world will be in love with night  
And pay no worship to the garish sun."*

A new star lights the night sky and it will shine forever.

Grateful for having shared life's stage with Graham are his wife and soul mate of 48 years, Anna Marie, foreign exchange daughter Isabel Herguera of Dusseldorf, Germany, foreign exchange sister in law Chie (Nori) Otsubo of Marugame, Japan, sister Pam (Doug) Hauser of Moraga, CA, brother Russ (Leanna) Staines of Merida, Yucatan, cousin Wally (Sharon) Doolittle of Sioux Falls, SD, brothers in law Jay (Susan) DeVoss of Ft. Wayne, IN, Bruce (Nancy) Teachout of Yankton, SD, Bryan (Lisa) Teachout of Rapid City, SD, Brent (Lonie) Teachout of Piedmont, SD, honorary grandson Thatcher Diamond Hartman, several nephews, nieces, god children and extended family members, and the many friends and fans he garnered during his lifetime.

"Now cracks a noble heart. Good night, sweet prince. And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest."



Graham & Anna Marie, SD Governor's Awards in the Arts Ceremony Recipients, Outstanding Support for the Arts Award, 2017

## Remembering Graham Thatcher

### MEMORIAL CAST PARTY PROVIDES FITTING FINAL ACT FOR GRAHAM THATCHER

*Reviewed by Lois West Duffy and Anna Marie Thatcher*

The first of a two-show series called "Memorial Cast Party starring Neil Graham Thatcher," produced by Anna Marie Thatcher, his leading lady for 48 years, provided a fitting final act for a much-loved and admired teacher, writer, actor, friend, and self-described "happy guy." The show played to a full house - a cast of about 175 people - who joined in the celebration in the Historic Theatre of the Performing Arts Center in Rapid City on Monday, July 9, 2018. It had a one-night run in Rapid City, with the second production to be staged at the Hacienda de Las Flores in Moraga, California on September 9.

Graham himself provided the theme for the show, "becoming stardust," as he described the act of dying. But the show, composed of numerous scenes focusing on aspects of Graham's life, was much more complex than that simple theme might indicate.

The stage was simply set with costumes representing the roles Graham had inhabited

in the plays produced by Periaktos Productions as ethics programs for Continuing Legal Education (CLE). Music by Gordy Pratt and Kenny Putnam kicked off the show, followed by a rendering of Graham's favorite piece of music, "Recuerdos de la Alhambra," beautifully performed by Chris Johnson. Anna Marie provided the welcome and closing comments, inviting cast members to share personal stories after the official program ended.

The production included recollections by a few cast members who had shared life's stage with Graham. Wayne Gilbert waxed on "The Group Theatre Years," Ron Reed recalled "Early Years at the Black Hills Playhouse and University of South Dakota," and Jay Hornbacher provided "Memories of a Fellow Actor." Joyce Jefferson offered "Memories of a Mentor," closing with Graham's admonishment to "Get the Check" - a kind of secret joke among actors. Jeff Viken recalled "Memories of the Friend and Lawyer Educator" and Janet Brown recalled "Memories of the Arts Advocate and Supporter." T. Mychael Rambo, who played the solo role in "Thurgood Marshall's Coming!," produced by Periaktos Productions, spoke of "Memories of the Playwright and Director." Rambo's performance, which began with a rousing direction of the entire cast singing "This Little Light of Mine, I'm Gonna' Let it Shine," was a highlight of the evening. Following his soliloquy, Rambo sang a moving "None of Us Are Free if One of Us is Chained," accompanied by The Band.

Periaktos Productions provided clips of Graham's Roles in CLE, and video of some of Graham's commercial work (including outtakes) from Hot Pink, Inc. provided a bit of comic relief! Music was an important feature of the evening with Meredith Meersman on piano, Gordy Pratt on guitar and percussion, Kenny Putnam on fiddle, and Dalyce Sellers playing guitar and singing. Vocal numbers, selected by Anna Marie as her tribute to Graham, included an inspirational "The Wind Beneath My Wings" and a nostalgic

"Autumn Leaves." A wistful "I'll be Seeing You" closed the show and it's safe to say the number left not a dry eye in the house. Graham's starlight, as the performances demonstrated, will shine forever.

Such a production would not have been possible without the backstage crew that included Cheryl Rudel (Set Décor), Amy McClure (Lighting), David Andrews and Rodger Hartley (Sound), Adam Schendzielos (Stage Manager), Susan Turnbull, Bill Fleming and Hot Pink, Inc. Staff (Photo Banners and Program Design), Jay Roman (Editing of Periaktos Video) and Nick Johnson and Staff (Assistance at the Performing Arts Center). Randall Iverson of Crow Ridge Productions filmed the stage production.

Memorabilia adorned the reception area and numerous photo banners, created by Susan Turnbull, depicted Graham's many roles during his lifetime. Chris Johnson and Paula Meloy set the mood with a variety of instrumental tunes. Catering assistants included Becky and Dowell Casselli-Smith, Marie and Chuck Fullenkamp, Marnie Gould, Kim and Don Kelley, Mary Linda McBride, Ginny and Darrel Nelson, Yoko Sugawara, Lisa Teachout, Nancy Teachout, Pam Teaney Thomas, Lyn and Ray Tysdal and Mo Zimney.

All cast and crew teamed up to create a beautiful tribute and a most memorable celebration!

