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When Lindsey Wilson College (LWC) senior Brenna Murray walks across the stage at the graduation ceremony in May, she will have been a pioneer and a representation of the growth and success of the Theatre Department at LWC.

Murray has a lot of work to do before she leaves one life and enters a new one, but she is in an exciting position. Murray is going to be the very first graduate from LWC with a major in Theatre.

"It's kind of a cool feeling [being the first theatre major graduate]," Murray said. "It hasn't really sunk it yet. It hasn't even really sunk in completely that I'm graduating yet. I don't feel like I'm ready to graduate yet."

Murray is the first theatre major senior graduating from LWC because she has been at the college from the theatre program's beginning. In 2010, when Murray came to LWC, there was no theatre program at all. Over the last four years the theatre program has achieved numerous things

"It's nice to have been able to see the program start from the little wooden carpeted stage in V.P. Henry [Auditorium] with six or seven lights to the awesome thing we have now with the balconies," Murray said. "It's cool to come to a program where we didn't even have a minor and now we have the full major. So it was really cool to see the program grow and be the first person to walk out of here."

In these few years, the theatre program has grown at a remarkable rate. Now, the only improvements to it that Robert Brock, assistant professor of theatre at LWC, can see are students studying abroad and getting a special Fine Arts Building on campus to work in.

"The theatre has evolved now to where it is maxed out," Brock said. "We are at the top. ... We are doing more than any other small college theatre program I know of already."

Around 15 years before Brock came to LWC, Susan Minton, associate professor of communication at the college, was the only one running any sort of theatre activity. She directed a children's play for the community, especially the Adair County Elementary



Center Stage

Theatre program evolves into major production

Schools, every year.

Asa Swan, assistant professor of history at LWC who minored in and loves theatre, began working at the college in the fall of 2007. Wanting to see more theatre at LWC, Swan soon asked Bettie Starr, vice president for academic affairs at the college, about starting a theatre club.

"I asked her if I started a theatre club, would she support us doing a production, and she said, 'Definitely!'" Swan said. "That was a hole in our liberal arts program here, that we didn't have any theatre at all."

The following fall, Swan placed flyers around campus about a meeting for a theatre club, and around 20 people attended demonstrating interest. The Lindsey Wilson Players (LWP) were formed.

The first play that LWP put on with Swan was "All in the Timing" by David Ives in November, which produced more interest and growth in the theatre club. Starr was able to provide some funding to LWP the

following spring, and the club performed "Rumors" by Neil Simon.

However, LWP was unable to produce a play in the fall of 2009, partially due to the fact that Swan was beginning his PhD program.

"You don't really call that a theatre program," Brock said about LWP. "No minor, no major, no theatre classes at all. It was just, people got together to put on some plays every once in a while."

Brock got involved at LWC in 2010. He had been running Kentucky Repertory Theatre, a professional regional theatre in Horse Cave, Ky., and wanted a change. He spoke with Starr, who wanted LWC to have an actual theatre program and had been talking with people with theatre experience in the area.

"I came over first as a guest director, and I directed 'Antigone' [in the Hodge Discipleship Center]," Brock said. "That was in the spring of 2010. And then the fall of 2010 I came back and did 'Steel Magnolias.' And by that time I knew I would be coming here full time."

Brock became a full time LWC faculty member in January 2011 and put on another show with LWP called 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' by William Shakespeare, which was performed in V.P. Henry. Brock also taught some basic theatre courses, and a proposal for a theatre minor was written up and approved.

The minor and its associated classes were available in the 2011 fall semester. During that semester, Brock also continued Minton's children's play tradition and put on a difficult play called "The Crucible."

"I've got people from all over the campus," Brock said. "I've got football players, I've got golfers, I've got swimmers. It's not just like there's theatre types that are gravitating towards theatre, it's a lot of people. A lot of variety. And so there were a lot of people that wanted to do it [The Crucible]. And I think with 'The Crucible', we took it up a notch."

The choice of the play and the acting in it made "The Crucible" a success, despite the fact that there were so few resources to work with.

The following spring, two more shows were produced. One of these plays was LWC's first musical, "Godspell," which emphasized the lack of resources for the theatre department to use even further, especially where sound was concerned.

Back then, V.P. Henry was very different. The chairs were wooden, there were only six lighting instruments, the stage was bare with only one curtain the drew across the front, and there was no sound system at all.

"I went to Roger Drake, who was the vice president [at LWC] at the time," Brock said. "I said, 'Look, we're doing a musical, I've

got to have a sound system. We've got to rent one or something.' I said, 'But here's my idea. What I think could happen here is, and I don't know if the college wants to do this... but what if we renovate V.P. Henry and turn it into a theatre?'"

Since he was a professional musician, Drake understood Brock's position. Part of a sound system was brought in for "Godspell." Drake and LWC President Bill Luckey were supportive of the renovation idea.

Over the summer of 2012, V.P. Henry was renovated into what it is today and provided a home for the theatre department. If this had not happened, Brock believes the theatre major would not have become a reality. The theatre program would have a lot of struggles.

"It [the renovation] changed the lay of the land," Brock said. "And it drummed up more interest. Now it wasn't just students on campus who wanted to do a play, now there's high school students looking at Lindsey as a place to go to study theatre. And then we proposed the major, and that was approved. So then all of a sudden we have a theatre major. We applied for and received a chapter charter to be a chapter of the Alpha Psi Omega National Theatre Honor Society and inducted members."

By 2013, LWC's theatre program had already made very significant progress.

During the summer of 2013, more progress was made. The theatre department hosted the first TheatreFest!, a community theatre program.

Despite all of these advancements, something was still missing.

"So here we had the renovation in V.P. Henry, but we didn't have stuff," Brock said. "We rented costumes for every show. I would try to get Plant, when we could, work it out for them to build sets for us. But any furniture, we got to go digging around for it. Any props, we got to go digging around for it. A lot of stuff we just didn't have at our disposal."

After the recent closure of the Kentucky Repertory Theatre, there was an auction on its contents. Having run for 36 years, the theatre had thousands of costumes and props that altogether are worth at least \$30,000. With permission from the LWC administration, Brock bid on and won all the contents for a lower cost.

In one weekend, the contents were moved to fill up three extra large storage units. It took six loads in the largest U-Haul truck available.

Brock sees this purchase as the next step after the renovation. It was another major milestone for the theatre program.

"It's hard to paint a picture in words of what this is," Brock said. "It's almost like you would have had to of been there the three days we loaded it out and saw everything coming out, and you go, 'Oh my gosh! This an enormous acquisition. This is unbelievable.'"

On top of this recent event, Murray will be graduating this May. Three other theatre major will graduate this December, Samuel Wilson, Lacy Martin, and Erika Finley.

There is also the excitement of this summer. Finley and at least two other students will be working professionally. Finley will be working with Unto These Hills Outdoor Drama in Cherokee, North Carolina. The other students who have contracts so far are Jeremy Cloyd and Timothy Hoffman at Snow Camp Outdoor Theatre in Snow Camp, North Carolina.

TheatreFest! will also be returning this summer.

"We launched that [TheatreFest!] last year," Brock said. "It's coming back this year, and hopefully there will be more audience, it'll grow over time, and turn into a nice little summer regional theatre."

Brock and his students stay busy year round. Because of this, LWC's theatre program has advanced from infancy to maturity at an incredibly fast rate. It stands as a testament to what can be achieved with hard work, dedication, good ideas, and cooperation.

"I'm so proud of how the theatre program has grown under Robert's leadership," Swan said. "I think he and our students have done a great job just bringing a very important form of artistic expression to our campus."



Lights Out... Continued from page 1

ing that it was in too bad shape and would cost too much to fix up. Then, he just said off the cuff that I could buy it."

Arnold was surprised by the offer and immediately asked how much it would cost. Coomer told him that he could pay \$25,000 and it was his. Arnold agreed and became owner of the theatre. However, Coomer was right. The theatre was in need of major renovation to get back into working order.

"I was shocked when I went down to see it," Arnold said. "It was in too bad of shape. Two years of restoration and \$380,000, it was good to go."

Arnold ran the business with the assistance of his friend, Ben Burris, who was also a fan of the theatre. He said the theatre hosted several events, including musicals, beauty pageants, lectures, and recognition of those working on the theatre and town square. Arnold's son also screened his short film "Resurrection Mary" at the theatre. It was also a popular place for their kids, as well as others, to work and to earn spending money.

Arnold says that the theatre was also a nice hang out spot for the students at Lindsey Wilson College, even having special showings and admission prices for students.

However, despite the love that people had for the theatre, it was not a profitable business, according to Arnold. He had to personally invest his own money into the theatre all but one year to keep it going, usually between \$20 thousand and \$30 thousand dollars per year.

"Time and money became the main issues and were the reasons why the theatre closed," Arnold said. "It was difficult to run as a cash business with varied student workers. After Ben [Burris] wasn't there, it was difficult for me to watch over it as well."

The theatre's last day of business was September 18, 2008. After renovations were made in 2011, "The Event," a concert featuring artist Kurt Vernon, was held at the Columbian Theatre, but as of now, there are currently no plans for the theatre to reopen and show films.

Unless something changes, the theatre will sit vacant behind the fountain on the town square, with the old unlit sign still suspended, bringing back pleasant memories for Arnold and many other residents of Columbia.

"People loved the theatre," Arnold said. "It was always a joy to go down there when a good crowd was present and smell the popcorn again."