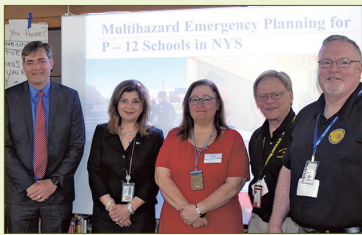


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A Space For Theatrics

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Just as the sun goes down, the lights go up at Eastline Theatre on Wantagh Avenue. Many of the actors, directors and crew members come to the intimate black box theater directly from their day jobs, changing out of their business attire and into their costumes for the evening.

The payoff is personal, vice president Susan Berkowitz said. All of the actors at the nonprofit theater volunteer their talents on the stage and all revenue goes back into future productions.

"We want people to come here and have an experience," Berkowitz said. "We want them to think about this place differently from other places."

Though many have passed the theater without ever entering its doors, the 42-seat space has hosted productions for nearly six years, previously under the name Eastline

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ON THE COVER

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Productions. In September 2017, it came under new management with a new mission.

“What Eastline represents, I suppose, is a way of getting away from the usual, safe, comfortable fare that we’re used to in community theater and presenting things that we don’t normally get to see,” said Bob Higgins, president of Eastline Theater.

A native of Freeport, Higgins was a retired firefighter when his son, Daniel Higgins, originally from Malverne, proposed renovating and rebranding Eastline. The younger Higgins, now Eastline’s executive artistic director, had seen the theater grow since its early years and felt that he could change the sensibility of the production space under a nonprofit model.

“Theater is a mechanism to help enrich its community, and, to me, the best way to that is to do shows about community while also being one,” Daniel Higgins said. “If we’re a community theater, we have to exist for the purpose of it. Exist as it, exist for it, and then change the definition of it.”

Since the shift late last year, the theater has run a number of groundbreaking performances, including the regional premiere of *Oslo*, a Tony award-winning play that examines the negotiations that led to the Oslo Peace Accords. Daniel Higgins, who directed the production, said the theater hopes to feature more plays that introduce audiences to challenging subject matter.

Upcoming productions for the 2018 season include *God of Vengeance* by Sholem Asch, *Laughter on the 23rd Floor* by Neil Simon and *Prospero (Live!)*, written by Daniel Higgins and John Brautigam and the first original work the company has produced.

Prospero (Live!), which opens in August, will feature live music performed by the actors themselves. According to Berkowitz, the production would not have been possible without a recent grant from the Huntington Arts Council, part of which will be used to bring this Shakespeare adaptation to life.

Through the support of grant funding and donations, the nonprofit has developed innovative productions without demands from stakeholders. Operating as a nonprofit also allows the theater to keep prices low without sacrificing production quality.

An adult ticket typically costs \$20, cheaper than that of other Long Island and New York theaters.



“

Eastline represents a way of getting away from the usual, safe, comfortable fare that we’re used to in community theater and presenting things that we don’t normally get to see.

—Bob Higgins, president of Eastline Theater

Many comparable theater companies on Long Island travel from venue to venue without a permanent space to perform. According to Berkowitz, the black box theater has allowed Eastline to grow.

“Having a permanent home is a major difference,” Berkowitz said. “It allows you to have a real brand, which is what we’re trying to do.”

When not hosting rehearsals or performances, fundraising events and community theater programs are held within the building.

Starting June 8, Eastline Theatre will welcome actor and director Frank Dispigno for an eight-week course for adult actors looking to expand their skill sets. Dispigno has



worked on more than 150 productions and is well-known in the Long Island theater community, Daniel Higgins said.

Just as the off-Broadway theater circuit in Manhattan influences the Broadway circuit, Daniel Higgins hopes Eastline Theater can play a role in shaping conversations within the communities it serves.

“If we do the work that reflects the world we want to see or the topics that

we want to talk about it, then the community around us will start to discuss them, and hopefully, eventually, deal with them,” Daniel Higgins said.

Red Scare on Sunset is currently on stage at Eastline Theatre and will run through June 3.

Readers can receive a \$5 discount on their tickets by using the promo code ‘AANTON’ at checkout. Find out more about the show and Eastline Theatre on page 7A.