

# Theatergoers can't get enough of the Footliters

Group's production of 'The Music Man' is a sensation; final performances are Friday and Saturday

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CADILLAC NEWS

**CADILLAC** — The Cadillac Footliters are on fire.

Not like the tragic fire of November 1989 that destroyed their building, a former movie theater in downtown Cadillac with a lighted marquee.

They are on fire with the public. Their production of "The Music Man" is a hot ticket.

Last weekend, more than 500 people attended the show, an all-time record.

"The Footliters have been around for 54 years in buildings in theaters and churches," said Dave Johnson, director of the musical production. "I moved here 15 years ago to teach in Mesick. I was the theater director there. I knew the Footliters were out there, but I never really heard much. Now, it seems like everybody in the community is talking about us. The feel in the community is different than it was."

## Interest increased in Season 52

Attendance at Footliters' productions has been rising steadily for the last couple of years.

"I've been involved about 17 years," said Laura Porter, vice president. "The burst we are having right now, I've never seen anything like this. We've had ups and downs, but this increase in attendance and participation is incredible. I can't explain it."

"I have rarely been as excited about theater as I am right now," said Andy True, Footliters president, in "The Music Man" playbill. "We have seen a tremendous increase in new faces ... all with a great passion for theater."

The Footliters have been staging productions since 1964.

"I joined in 1989," said Karen Nicholas. "We've had successful productions in the past, back in the 1980s and 1990s. 'Nunsense' filled the auditorium, and that was a milestone for us. And 'High School Musical,' in season 44 was popular."

Those familiar with the group's history can recall well-attended favorite productions. But there were many times when the Footlitter's yearned to look out over the lights to a packed house.

That dream slowly started



Joseph Baumann, center, as the professor. To his left are cast members Sara Peltier, Mary Kibbe, Sally Goggin, Corbyn Martin, Katelyn Curtis, and Jon VanBrocklin. To Baumann's right are Terry Bertrand, Lisa Martok, Ginny Cundiff, Elizabeth Pechota, Emily Brannam, Heather Brannam, and Clare Sheehan.

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coming into focus in Season 52 with the production of "Into the Woods."

## Here's why the Footliters are a hot ticket — new talent and Junior Players

"Footliters has been building momentum since last spring with the musical, "Into the Woods," said Melissa Kendell, a board member who performed in that production. "That musical brought new talent with Kelli Simons, Scott Reagan, Brandon Peltier, Julie Van Haitisma, just to name a few — and Dave Johnson."

When a job change brought Johnson to the Wexford-Missaukee Intermediate School District, he auditioned for a role in "Into the Woods" and became hooked.

With the success of that show, the next two productions, "A Christmas Story" and "Little Shop of Horrors," attracted more people to the auditions.

"Historically, we haven't had great turnouts for auditions," Porter said. "For the most part,

the Footliters have had a small, loyal following through the years, but I don't remember anything like what's going on now. I'm proud that some of this is the result of the Junior Players."

About 10 years ago, Porter helped found the Junior Players with one designated production per year and a drama camp.

"This group has grown and grown," she said. "Now we have those parents in our ranks, and they are extremely supportive."

"Now we have children doing shows together with their parents," added Kendell. "Footliters gives young players a creative outlet and a theater family."

## Passion for theater

And then there's Joseph Baumann. The vice president and general counsel of Wolverine Power showed up in Season 53 to audition for "A Christmas Story" and landed the lead role, plus leads in the next two productions. The Cadillac newcomer brought a resume packed with theater experience and his passion has boosted morale. He

states on his Facebook page that he has been hooked on community theater for years.

"Since the age of 10, theater has been a source of confidence .. it has helped me build strong and long-lasting friendships, and recently, helped me acclimate to a new town," he wrote. "I am gobsmacked by their talent and commitment."

"Joe is fantastic in everything he does," said Johnson. "He brings professionalism, he's been doing this forever. He brings experience and grace. That brings a buzz. But that doesn't discount the others we have, the new people that break out."

Johnson stressed that the current cast is packed with talent, 54 actors altogether:

"And then we have Sally," he added.

Theater veteran Sally Goggin, a past president, director and actor, is back.

"We're putting everything into this," Goggin said. "Now we have people that care about the performances. We have people dedicated to theater. It just all happened

at the same time. New people got excited starting with "Into the Woods." New people auditioned and it made a huge difference."

That difference is palpable. That difference is passion. Rave reviews posted by theatergoers on social media include these comments: "amazing, best play ever, a true delight, fantastic!"

"Every production is a chance to build a new family," said Johnson. "For eight weeks, you are each other's best friends. You are so happy for one another. Everyone is having fun. There's just nothing like it. It's one of the greatest feelings in the world."

Director Dave Johnson is working with three assistant directors, including Jennifer Neff, Shaina Squires and Shelley Taylor.

Performances are at 7 p.m. in the Cadillac High School auditorium on Oct. 6 and 7 and at 2 p.m. on Oct. 7.

Tickets are available at the UPS Store, Brinks Custom Framing, Peebles, Majestic Hair Design, After 26 Cafe, or contact the box office, (231) 775-7336.

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