

One in a *Ver* Million Meet Erin Conlon

By David Lias
david.lias@plaintalk.net

The Vermillion Community Theatre's successful production of the Broadway musical "Annie" last weekend can be credited to dozens of people performing both on stage and behind the scenes.

A mainstay of the VCT – one of the reasons it is able to celebrate a decade-long string of success in the community – is Erin Conlon. She has appeared in virtually every community theatre production in Vermillion for the past 10 years and beyond, sharing

her talents as an actor, dancer and vocalist.

"I wasn't a part of 'Our Town,' and I think that was in 2007 or 2008, and that was because I was music directing 'The Pirates of Penzance' later that summer," Erin said. "I've been involved in something with the VCT for the last 10 years. Every summer I've been doing something, whether that's performing or directing or music directing – it's been something."

Her involvement goes back beyond a decade, when the community theatre was robust here, but then faded for a time before getting a

new breath of life 10 years ago.

"Before the current incarnation that we are celebrating, back in 1991 or 1992, I did 'The Music Man' with the community theatre, and I was in that with my father, who has since passed away, so that's a very special memory for me, to be in the kids' chorus of that," Erin said. "I remember being in awe of all of the older kids and all of the adults, and being excited to do costumes and makeup."

"That was a pretty formative experience for me in the VCT, so getting to be a part of it now as an adult and knowing that I'm helping be part of the group that gives that experience to the kids who are in it today is wonderful," she said. "That kind of continuity is so special."

Erin said she was also active in music in school and church, but her experiences with musical theatre with the VCT "solidified for me that this was something that I wanted to do on a regular basis, and as often as I could. It was just way too much fun and inspiring for me to ever want to leave it."

Erin is a 2000 graduate of Vermillion High School and studied vocal performance at USD.



Erin Conlon (right) in the role of Miss Hannigan in the VCT production of "Annie." (Photo by David Lias)

"After I finished my time there, I went on tour with the Children's Theatre Company of South Dakota, which is now called Dakota Players," she said. "I toured with them as an actor/director, and got to go all over South Dakota, and a little bit in Nebraska as well."

"We did plays with kids, and directed them, which was a great experience," Erin said.

About a year after she finished touring, Erin rejoined the staff of Dakota Players as tour manager.

"I'm responsible for bookings and schedules and helping people find grant money and making sure they're ready for when the current tour team comes to town," she said. "I still get to stay involved with children's theatre in that way, so I split my time between that and

(working at) Nook 'n Cranny, where I've been for many years now."

This summer, Erin's childhood experience with the VCT came full circle. Playing the tyrannical Miss Hannigan, the orphanage supervisor, Erin was constantly surrounded by scores of local youth who were part of the musical's cast.

"My work with children's theatre, I think, was excellent preparation for this," she said. "... there are several of these girls who have worked with me before or seen me before, so they know who I am and they are not intimidated by me or scared of me because they know me, and yet I get to play this character who is so very, very mean to them."

"It's fun to watch them figure it all out," Erin said. "I've had a couple girls come up to me and say, 'you know, we actually like you even though you have to be mean.'"

That's kind of a fun experience, watching the girls put that all together, to realize that it isn't actually me that's doing that, rather it's the character I'm playing. It's a great joy to be able to share that, and to lead by example."

For years, Vermillion Community Theatre has been a major part of Erin's life. Years ago, however, she likely couldn't have imagined just how meaningful her involvement would turn out to be.

"Two weeks ago, I got engaged, and my fiancé and I met doing community theatre," Erin said. "That's another reason why VCT is now even more important to me, because it's how I met my future husband."

The lucky groom-to-be is David Burrow, who appeared as President Franklin Roosevelt in last weekend's production of "Annie."

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