

One in a Ver Million

Meet Anthony Burbach

By David Lias
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The rich cultural boost provided each summer by the Vermillion Community Theatre (VCT) can be credited to scores of volunteers who have worked tirelessly for years.

The VCT, however, has received a significant boost over the last decade or so thanks to its current musical director, Anthony Burbach.

He has appeared onstage for several VCT performances over the years. He is most comfortable, however, in the pit, behind a keyboard, leading the musicians who make it possible for the VCT to present musical theatre to the stage of the Vermillion High School Performing Arts Center each summer.

Anthony grew up on an acreage near Sioux City, IA, and began playing piano while a third-grader. "I played all the way through high school, and I spent a lot of time at the piano."

During his years as a student at the University of South Dakota, his involvement with music lessened as he pursued a biology degree. "I did end up doing some accompanying for the

music department, and I sang in Chamber Singers when I first came here, but I wasn't a music major and I wasn't taking many music classes."

His role as an accompanist helped rekindle his desire to put his musical talents to use.

"VCT was reborn 10 years ago when the United Church of Christ did a fundraiser for Make A Wish," Anthony said. "It was 'The Christmas Carol.' We took the Charles Dickens story and we added the Muppet music. We got permission from Disney to use that music ... and I spent a lot of time working with that music and working with a very small band, and about that time, I asked, 'Why isn't there a community theatre in town?'"

He was told there used to be an active community theatre in Vermillion. And that it even had some funds left in its checking account. "So I said, 'Let's get it started again.' A couple of the people who had been very involved with VCT in the past were willing to help get it restarted again," Anthony said.

The "new" VCT's first presentation was a non-musical, "The Dining

Room," presented in the winter.

"That summer, we were extremely fortunate to have our reincarnation coordinate with the building of this theatre," Anthony said, referring to the VHS Performing Arts Center. "It was that summer that the theatre was actually available for the first time, so we were very lucky to be able to step in and use this wonderful space."

"We are extremely lucky that the school district is very welcoming to us to come in here in the summer and do our rehearsals and our shows here," he said.

Besides serving as musical director, Anthony also fulfills the roles of a producer, and recruits the director and the choreographer.

"The director and I then pick a show, and the VCT has a board of directors and they're very supportive," he said, "but ultimately I help put the pieces of the pie together and finds someone to do costumes and finds someone to do all the extra little things and bring them all together for the first rehearsal."

Next month, the VCT will present the musical



"Annie." Director Jen Dickenson has been busy directing the cast in rehearsals for several weeks now.

VCT has a proven record of being able to successfully stage some of the most popular and challenging musicals staged in contemporary Broadway theatre.

"I'm able to find a very talented director every year to help guide the show ... I don't have a lot of theatre background - over the last 10 years I've developed a lot musical theatre experience, but I don't have the technical ideas on how to make a scene flow, and how someone should come on stage and how to stand

and how to say their lines and how to get offstage and have it all look nice. I don't have that expertise, so I rely on bringing on quality directors.

"Probably the biggest challenge is making sure that everyone feels special," he said. "There are lead characters, and there are other people, and I try to make sure that this experience is just as exciting for everyone else so that they keep coming back. Eventually, some of those people are going to have a chance to have a lead, too, so I want to keep them excited and keep them interested and make sure that they are having just as much fun."

"VCT has prided itself in making sure that anyone who wants to be on stage can be on stage," Anthony said. "About the only thing that will keep someone from being on stage is too many conflicts during the summer. If you're free during the summer, we will put you on stage. We've had casts of over 150 people in some productions."

And year, after year, a top-notch performance is offered to the Vermillion community.

"It's the talented people we have in support," he said. "We have a great technical director, the costumer always steps up - we have a great group of people. We have a lot of dedicated, talented people who step up when I ask. "I love the cast - that's a lot of fun, too," Anthony said, "and I do a lot of the set work, too, and it's just so nice to be able to put this stuff together for this cast. It's so much fun, and there's so much reward with that."

Anthony and his wife, Gretchen, who teaches music at Vermillion's two public elementary schools, have lived in Vermillion for nearly 20 years, raising their three children, Abby, 11, Ben, 7, and Sarah, 4.

"Part of the reason I'm so successful with the community theatre is I have such a loving and forgiving and sharing family that lets me be off doing all of these other projects," he said. "They are very supportive and very patient."

His family often follows him during the summer. Both Gretchen and Abby have roles in "Annie."

"Ben is more interested in sports, and Sarah comes to a lot of rehearsals and sits and watches," Anthony said.

Performances of "Annie" will be held Friday, July 20, Saturday, July 21 and Monday, July 23 at 7 p.m. along with a matinee on Sunday, July 22 at 2:30 p.m. All performances will be at the Vermillion High School Performing Arts Center.

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