



Greased Lightnin'

MoCo Arts Teen Theatre Presents Iconic Musical

By Sarah Sherman / Photography by Michael Moore

Just in case you'd forgotten: Grease is the word.

"Grease: School Version" will be performed by the MoCo Arts Teens Musical Theatre program Sunday, Jan. 14, at 2 and 7 p.m. at the Redfern Arts Center at Keene State College. The school version of this iconic musical theater classic is a new family-friendly production that is appropriate for all ages and will be brought to the stage by MoCo Arts students in grades 6 to 12.

In "Grease: School Version," the audience can experience the friendships, romances and adventures of a group of high school kids in the 1950s, much as they did in the movie, but with some adaptations that take the production from a PG to a G rating, said Marty Hennem, artistic director of theatre at MoCo Arts. As many may recall from the movie, the plot centers around the blossoming, albeit sometimes rocky, romance between greaser Danny Zuko and new girl Sandy Olsson as they negotiate the differences between their backgrounds.

"Many people have seen the original iconic movie Grease; our version is very similar but it has some twists of its own that are different from the movie," said Faith Patenaude, a sophomore at Keene High School who plays the role of Sandy. "There are going to be surprises for everyone. It's a nice show, geared towards all ages."

As Hennem explained, many people confuse the movie starring Olivia Newton John and John Travolta with the musical theater production, but the musical theater show has adapted and morphed several times in its history. This new school version has cleaned up the language a bit and taken out some of the content that might be considered questionable for a younger cast. Many of the classic songs will be included in the MoCo production – 10 in total – including "Grease is the Word" and "You're the One that I Want," which Hennem paid extra royalty fees to have included in the show. "Hopelessly Devoted to You" is not part of the school version of the production.

MoCo Arts programs are designed to encourage kids of all ages to explore the joy of musical theater. Students as young as 4 are encouraged to take part in MoCo's Storytime Theatre class. They can then move on to Tweens Musical Theatre and Teens Musical Theatre as they get older. Students in every class can audition, rehearse and perform



Opposite page: Faith Patnaude stars as Sandy and Connor White as Danny in the MoCo Arts Teens Musical Theatre production of "Grease: School Version." Above, left to right, Colby Beam, Logan Phillips, Connor White, Henry Kostick, Caleb Hansel and Thomas Meiklejohn rehearse a musical number from the show. Below, left to right, cast members include Jayna Leach, Faith Patenaude, Maude Warshaw, Maddie Tremblay, Olivia Stanley, Colby Beam, Logan Phillips and Connor White.

in productions, learning skills like teamwork and cooperation that will stay with them beyond the studios.

There are 62 students in the "Grease" production, from all over the region including the Fall Mountain School District, Peterborough and even Massachusetts. Classes meet weekly and the cast began learning the show in September.

"It's short and intensive," Hennem said. "The kids do a great job... Some are very serious and some are just there for fun and to be with other like-minded kids who enjoy the arts," said Hennem. "They work on life skills like teamwork, problem-solving and confidence-building skills."

Hennem has been artistic director for 16 years and as

she also works with younger age groups at MoCo, she has seen many of the teenaged students progress in the arts for many years. She has written recommendations for students entering the military and seen several go on to professional theater productions.

"It's fun to see them develop over the years," Hennem said. "It really is like a family... the older kids mentor the younger ones and it's very nice. They work well together."

Patenaude agreed. "I love being a part of the musical theater program at MoCo Arts," she said. "I started in 7th grade and I was very shy. When I came here everyone opened their arms to me, it's one big family."

Connor White plays Danny Zuko in the production has been performing with the MoCo theater programs since elementary school. He will sing "Alone at a Drive-In" in the school version.

Hennem encouraged the community come out this weekend and enjoy this "quintessential musical theater experience" as performed by area students.

"They're great kids," she said. "I feel honored to work with them. I really hope people will come support the hard work of these kids."

"Grease: School Version" will be performed Sunday, Jan. 14, at 2 and 7 p.m. at the Redfern Arts Center at Keene State College. Tickets to "Grease: School Version" are \$14 for youth and seniors; \$20 for general admission. To purchase tickets, visit the Redfern Arts Center box office, Monday through Friday, from noon to 6 p.m., or call 358-2168. For more information about "Grease: School Version" or to purchase tickets online, visit www.moco.org. "Grease: School Version" is sponsored in part by Silver Direct.

