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Notes from editor (not for publication):



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

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1 Rock River Players one-act festival honors Ely’s memory

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3 TEXT BODY:

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4 The Rock River Players continues its spring tradition of
5 offering a lineup of short plays Thursday through Sunday, May 21
6 to 24, officially renaming the production the “Annual Tom Ely
7 Festival of One-Acts” in memory of a beloved participant who
8 embodied the spirit of community theater in this region.

9 For the fifth year, the festival will showcase a breadth of
10 local talent, featuring a collection of four short plays, all by area

11 playwrights. “The lineup offers moments of laughter and
12 reflection, exploring universal themes—of family, memory,
13 technology, connection, and grief—through four distinct lenses,”
14 organizers said in a news release.

15 On the program:

16 • *The Bench*, by John Swartz and directed by Charlene
17 Kennedy, offers a poignant character study centered on three
18 people with personal ties to a deteriorating park bench,
19 examining the quiet stories born in shared spaces and the
20 meaning we apply to them.

21 • *The Mockingbird’s Nest*, by Craig Bailey and directed
22 by Shey Nessralla making his directorial debut, is a futuristic
23 satire examining the intersection of technology, human
24 connection, and lengths we’re willing to go to alleviate our guilt.

25 • *Work and Play*, written and directed by RRP newcomer
26 Jon DeAngelis, provides a riotous collision between the past and
27 present, bringing the audience into one family’s 1940s living
28 room. The characters’ quintessential domestic life is interrupted
29 by the distractions of modern life.

30 • *Advocate for the Dead*, by Miles Ledoux and directed
31 by Kay Beckett, brings an original Agatha Christie adaptation to
32 the stage with an atmospheric drama set against the cliffs of
33 Mallorca, exploring themes of mortality and the paths we leave
34 behind.

35 Ely, a core company member who died in 2025, shared
36 the belief that participating in theater is about “much more than
37 being on stage. The production celebrates his lasting legacy of
38 inclusion and the spirit of exploration he brought to every
39 production, said organizers.

40 “This year’s lineup offers a vibrant snapshot of the
41 creative talent that exists all around us here in southern Vermont,”
42 said Amy Donahue, the show’s producer and RRP’s artistic
43 director. “And the opportunity to stage these stories in memory of
44 Tom is a profound honor. We hope this collection of thought-

45 provoking works serves as a fitting tribute to his passion for the
46 power of community theater to bring us together.”

47 In addition to playwrights and directors, this year’s
48 company includes artists: Jonathan Benney, Emmadora Boutcher,
49 Susan Boyd Joyce, Peter Broussard, Aaron Buchman, Tobi
50 Buchman, Amy Donahue, James Duffy, Harral Hamilton, Ena
51 Küpper, Dyana Lee, Ann Linge, Linda Lipkin, Laura Lockie,
52 Tamar Mentzer, Nick Morgan, and Nicole Winot, with Jess
53 Guerrero on lights and sound.

54 Performances are at Williamsville Hall, 35 Dover Rd.,
55 Thursday through Saturday, May 21–23, at 7 p.m., and Sunday,
56 May 24, at 3 p.m.

57 In the spirit of making the arts accessible to all, RRP
58 launches with this production a sliding-scale ticket range of \$15
59 to \$25, with no one turned away for lack of funds.

60 Tickets are available both in advance at
61 rockriverplayers.org, or at the door (with cash, check, card, or
62 Venmo/PayPal). For more information about the show or tickets,
63 contact info@rockriverplayers.org.

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