

# Manlius senior center to host theater workshop

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The Manlius Senior Activity Centre is calling all creatives 55 and older to attend a free theater workshop it's hosting on Thursday, March 14.

The interactive, instructional workshop lasts from 12:45 to 1:45 p.m. that day, and it will be held in the Village Centre auditorium at 1 Arkie Albanese Ave. in Manlius.

There is no limit to the number of participants, and it's open to the entire community, not just members and regular visitors of the senior center or residents of Manlius.

"We have our members that are gonna do it, but we need more people from the community," said Ann Smith, the executive director of the Manlius Senior Activity Centre.

Guided by the good people from Gregson Theater, the workshop will let participants experience some theatrical, music-making and storytelling exercises. The hourlong session will serve as an introduction to a series of rehearsals and eventually a full-

scale personalized production with those involved.

With that, it will be up to the returning participants and the workshop instructors to put their heads together and conjure up an original script based on the ideas everyone brings forward.

Barbara Gregson, a theater director and performer who will be leading the workshop, said she and her colleagues will be coming in with a loose, "nebulous" aim for the production but will flesh it out with extra wrinkles hammered down between now and then. What the finer details of the finished product look like will depend on the types of people who show up to the workshop, how many people attend, where everyone's interests lie, and what ideas sprout up and come alive during that introductory session and the rehearsals.

"It's for people who have experience, and it's for some people who don't have any experience, so it's gonna be fun to have that mixture of different groups of people," Smith said.

Joined by musician Eric Porter, who sings, plays guitar, and



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A theater workshop is being offered by the Manlius Senior Activity Centre on March 14. All those 55 and up are welcome.



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does percussion, as well as Manlius Senior Activity Centre member Bonnie Carr as her assistant director, Gregson makes a point of scrapping the idea of holding auditions because she believes anyone willing to play a part in the production has something unique up their sleeves.

"It's all a welcoming, collaborative process," Gregson said. "If they're going to sign up and be in this show, they're gonna be involved, and they're gonna have fun and they're gonna love it. We'll be tailoring the play to them and having them run with it."

With nothing written down at first, Gregson likes to start with some stretching as a warm-up before teaching miming and movement and letting the participants divide into smaller groups, at which point they'll add the words through improvisation.

Just so they're not starting from scratch, she said she will arrive to the workshop with a choice of stories to use as jumping-off points and interpret in different ways, like the nursery rhyme "Jack and Jill," the fairy tale "Jack and the Beanstalk" and the myths of Pandora's box and the fall of Icarus.

Another technique Gregson might have in store is to have the workshop attendees tell their own stories derived from childhood memories, things they've always wanted to tell somebody but never have, or any other dramatic, poignant, comedic or otherwise surprising moments they recall from their lives.

Gregson said some people might play multiple roles if they wish, though everyone will contribute in some way to every aspect of the resulting production, from set building and painting to acting, mask making and costume design.

Interested individuals can call the senior center at 315-682-7889 to sign up or they can simply turn up to the workshop on a whim on March 14. In the event of a snow day, the workshop would be rescheduled to Tuesday, March 19.

People can go to the workshop to see if they want to be in the show, but if they can't make it, they can still partake in the production so long as they get to the first rehearsal that goes from 1 to 3

p.m. on Thursday, April 18.

There will be nine rehearsals altogether leading up to the fully developed show, which will run at the Manlius auditorium once in the afternoon on Friday, May 17 and once that same evening. Working titles include "Manlius Mayhem, Mime, Music and Words" and "Letters Never Sent."

At the upcoming workshop, Gregson and Porter will be able to answer questions, and they will hand out forms, a schedule and their contact information.

Gregson, a Guilford resident, has worked all across the Southern Tier and in her hometown of Philadelphia with rehabilitation hospitals, veterans homes, arts councils, colleges, high schools and even a men's prison. She is also the author of "Theater Artists Play: A Theater Artist's Guide to Making and Creating Your Own Theater Work!"

She has worked with Porter, an Oxford, New York, native and her go-to musical accompanist, for about 10 years now. Porter has worked with singers like Tom Waits and Charley Pride, and he has supplied music for Comedy Central's sketch comedy and stand-up show "Two Drink Minimum."

"He's an incredibly multi-talented instrumentalist and an incredible composer," Gregson said of Porter. "He's great at improvising and acting, because a lot of times he'll have to be in the show, and he's good at looking at what the action is and the time period we're doing and knowing how to stylize the music to that."

This theatrical project in Manlius is made possible with funds from the Statewide Community Re-Grants Program administered by CNY Arts.

"We're just excited to get this grant because we've never had theater at the senior center before," Smith said. "I haven't seen this offered a lot in the community, where seniors get together and put on a show for fun and just to connect with each other. I think it's a good opportunity for people."

Gregson said the workshop, rehearsals and eventual show all acts as a perfect entry point for people unfamiliar with theater, especially aging folks who need a way to be creative and use their minds.

For more info about Gregson and Porter, visit [gregson.theater](http://gregson.theater) and [ericporterstudios.com](http://ericporterstudios.com).