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## Whitley County theater group pulls back 'Curtains' on inaugural show, honors late stage mentor

Corey McMaken | The Journal Gazette  
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Ella Barrand, left, and Amy J. Jagger rehearse for “Curtains,” which opens tonight.

Courtesy

A new theater group is honoring a longtime educator as it opens its first show this weekend in Whitley County.

The Harold Company Performers will present the comedy musical “Curtains” today and Saturday at the Columbia City High School Performing Arts Center. The group is named in honor of the late Harold Norman, who taught at Churubusco High School for more than 40 years. During that time, he led many theater productions and mentored students such as Amy J. Jagger, who founded the new company. Each of its members was directly or indirectly influenced by Norman, she says.

“He started directing plays right away when he got out of college and started teaching at Churubusco, and then he directed 26 years of musicals at Churubusco High School,” Jagger says of Norman, who died in 2020.

Norman handed Jagger, a teacher at Churubusco Elementary School, the reins of the high school musical program for a time. Among other former students is Shane Barkley, who is directing “Curtains.” He is now the theater director at Columbia City High School, extending Norman’s influence to a new generation.

Around 20 performers have come from around the country to take part in “Curtains” and to honor Norman.

The PG-13 comedy takes place during opening night of a musical in 1959 Boston. When the leading lady is murdered on stage, everyone is considered a suspect. Jagger hopes audiences consider what a blessing it is to get away from negative distractions, have a cultural experience and laugh.

She plans to stage a musical with the company every other year, with cabarets in the off years. She already has ideas for the 2026 and 2027 shows. The goal is high-quality performances at low prices; tickets for “Curtains” are \$15 at the door.

Norman was a father figure to many students, Jagger says. He encouraged them but also pushed them hard. That’s part of the legacy she wants to honor with the theater company.

“I think everyone can identify with having a Harold in their lives,” she says. “And I hope maybe that will help people think about ... who are we being a Harold to in our life?”

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## If You Go

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What: “Curtains”

When: 7:30 p.m. today and Saturday

Where: Columbia City High School Performing Arts Center, 1600 Indiana 9, Columbia City

Admission: \$15 at the door

## **Corey McMaken**

Features and Engagement Editor