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## Grand guy with gift for drama: Outgoing Easthampton high teacher shapes musical

By CATHERINE BAUM  
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EASTHAMPTON - Retiring high school drama teacher Tom Smith said his favorite musical out of the dozen he's directed here is the one he's working on at the moment.

This year, it's "Guys and Dolls," a story of bets, the mission to save souls and love. Show times are Thursday at 6 p.m., Friday and Saturday at 7 p.m. and Sunday at 2 p.m. in White Brook Middle School. Smith, who came here in 1998, said he enjoys traditional musicals like "Guys and Dolls."

"To see the original characters take new life with every actor or actress who portrays the character is really fun," Smith said. "Every time you see it, it's like seeing it for the first time."

Lead roles include "Nicely-Nicely Johnson" by Manny Morales and R.J. Pause, "Sarah Brown" by Elizabeth Burdeau and Mia Wintheiser, "Nathan Detroit" by Tyler Connelly and Nate Flannery, "Miss Adelaide" by Shealyn Berube and Mimi Henault and "Sky Masterson" by Alex Meisner and Alex Parent.

A "Hot Box doll," Henault wore a bright red dress with a red rose and red lipstick during rehearsal last week. She admired her castmates' costumes, and noted every person plays a part.

"I like how each character runs into another character at some point," said Henault, a senior. "Their stories are completely separate, but they come together in the end."

Wintheiser, who noted her love for singing, recalled Smith's helpful advice: Sing as much as possible. Her voice grew in large part to his advice, she said.

Students echoed Wintheiser's appreciation for Smith's tricks and tips.

"He really knows how to teach when it comes to performing," said Wintheiser, a senior. "You always come away with something more."

Smith was hired by the Parent Council in 1998 to direct "Damn Yankees." The high school drama teacher position had been eliminated in the 1990s, but the School Department brought it back in 1998 with Smith. While the school pays the teacher salary, the Parent Council funds the annual musicals. Smith's position at the high school has not been advertised, Smith noted.

"Hopefully, the money will be there to hire the teacher," Smith said. He intends to continue working with the drama club directing musicals until another teacher gets the position, he said, to make for a smooth transition.

Smith said he has made a lot of "great friends" in his tenure. The arts are known to improve



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relationships between people, he said.

"With all the bullying and everything going on, theater's one of the areas where people should be appreciative of themselves," Smith said. "It helps students discover who they are."

To that end, Meisner said he has learned there is "no limit" to how much he can put into his role as big gambler "Sky Masterson."

"For me, it challenges me to be a very flashy, outgoing, show-off person," Meisner said.

Students and parents applauded Smith last week for his patience, sensitivity and dedication.

"He's really a great man with a passion for theater," said Meisner, 16. "We all love him - he's like a father to us."

Tickets to "Guys and Dolls" are \$10 for adults and \$8 for students and seniors. To purchase a ticket, call Michelle Connolly at 527-3028 or visit White Brook Middle School between 5 p.m. and 10 p.m. this week. Tickets may also be purchased at the door.

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