The Friends: By the Numbers

Dear Fellow Friends of The Rep:

With this, our final issue of Backstage of the 2016/17 Season, we say goodbye to another successful season at The Rep. Just like at the end of the calendar year, I feel a tug to take a look back at how this season went. I have some numbers to share with you. They're not exact, but decent estimates of how many hours our Friends group donates to assist The Rep. Here are a few:

- **105: Backstage** With interviews, editing, photography and production, our newsletter editor, Dan Reszel, puts in real time to get news to our members.

- **275: Rep Raffle** Between the planning and the hours spent selling tickets, The Rep Raffle ends up being time well-spent. We netted nearly $15,000 through raffle ticket sales, and that all goes right back to The Rep.

- **1000: Sundown Suppers** Every-Saturday-night dinner feeds all the cast and crew of every show produced in the three theaters for the whole season. Not only does it make a real impact on The Rep's budget, but volunteers enjoy cooking for and serving to the most appreciative group of diners ever.

- **16,040: Ushers** And the Granddaddy of them all, our ushers put in thousands of hours of volunteer time to help patrons of Rep productions have a world-class experience.

Aileen Smith, President of The Friends of Milwaukee Repertory Theater, on the fourth floor "hub" of The Rep's theater complex.
experience in our three venues. We couldn't do it without this dedicated and professional corps.

These, and many other, activities add up to what we estimate to be more than $400,000 worth of service The Friends donates to The Rep. Thank you, thank you, for all your help, and for your sunny attitudes. It's a pleasure to work with you. And, I can't wait for 2017/18!

Aileen Smith
2016/17 Friends of Milwaukee Repertory Theater President

Fate Plays a Part in Telling the McGuire Story on Rep's Stackner Stage
By Dan Reszel

In March, Tony award-winning actor Anthony Crivello wrapped up a highly-acclaimed portrayal of legendary Marquette basketball coach Al McGuire in The Rep's one-person play, McGuire. The demand for tickets was so strong that many who wanted to experience Crivello's tour-de-force performance were turned away. Crivello returns to the role for unprecedented encore performances of McGuire in the Stackner Cabaret, June 1 – 18. The production originally ran January 20 – March 19.

That The Rep can reboot McGuire and that Crivello's schedule can sync once more with the role in Milwaukee can be explained, at least in part, by serendipity; a word that personifies how McGuire came to be one of The Rep's biggest hits. During a recent conversation, Crivello explained how he, Al McGuire and The Rep intersected. It is a story that always seemed meant to be.

It was serendipity that Rep Artistic Director Mark Clements saw Crivello in a show in Chicago in fall 2015. A brief meeting after the performance led to lunch in Milwaukee where Clements floated the idea of Crivello starring in The Rep's Man of LaMancha (which opened the 2016/17 Season). A scheduling conflict prohibited the pairing, but it started the conversation that eventually led Crivello to McGuire.

Trustees.

Jill Heavenrich, a founding member of the Laura Sherry League, a pre-cursor to The Friends of The Rep, will be recognized for her many contributions in helping The Rep navigate through its early years in the 1950s and 60s. (See story below).

A cash bar cocktail hour begins at 5:30 p.m. with dinner served at 6:30. Cost is $35 per person and includes a choice of entrée. The evening will also feature award presentations to a Friends volunteer and a Rep staff person.

“Through Jill and Chad, we are extremely pleased to honor The Rep's incredible past, how important it is today and its promising future,” said Erin Burgess, Friends of The Rep Board member and co-chairperson of the event.

To purchase tickets, send your request to mroesner@milwaukeerep.com.

Direct questions to erinburgess1129@hotmail.com.

Rep Managing Director Chad Bauman will be a featured speaker at the annual Friends of The Rep social.
Dick Enberg's original *McGuire* script largely sprung from Enberg's eulogy of Al McGuire that he was asked to deliver by Al's widow, Pat, in 2001. Enberg's eulogy of his broadcast partner was filled with stories of Al's colorful life.

The original 2005 *McGuire* script was given renewed resonance through more "Al stories" that Enberg and Crivello worked on. Script updates were sent to Rep Associate Artistic Director Brent Hazelton (*McGuire*’s director) who provided additional writing contributions.

"Brent, Dick and I were able to dig into more material to bring out more of Al's fire, passion, emotion and Irish-Catholic guilt," said Crivello, who estimates more than 100 hours were spent working on the script, trying to capture a bigger-than-life character in 80 minutes of theater.

One of the challenges to bring the show to life is that much of the play's dialog, true to Al himself, does not follow a linear path. "If you listen to Al throughout the play, a lot of the show's lines are dissimilar," Crivello said. "It does not naturally connect."

A new *McGuire* debuted on the Stackner stage in time for the celebration of 100 years of Marquette basketball and on the 40-year anniversary of MU's national title win, Al McGuire's last game as coach.

"It was amazing doing *McGuire* in Milwaukee," said Crivello, "so many had an Al story." Including Crivello, who as a Marquette freshman during the 1974/75 season was a cheerleader who got an up close view of McGuire and his Warriors, consistently ranked among college basketball's elite. The 1974/75 Season ended with a 22-point loss to Kentucky in the NCAA tournament.

After that game as Crivello passed McGuire in a tunnel concourse near the locker rooms, Crivello said he shrugged, giving the coach a "what-can-you-do" look. McGuire stopped and told Crivello he knew going into the game that Kentucky's distinct height advantage would be too much to overcome. The next season 6-10 Jerome Whitehead and 6-9 Bernard Toone joined MU’s team, two critical building blocks to winning the national championship.

"I guess my conversation with Al, looking back now, was serendipitous," said Crivello, who started doing casual research on Al when he left Marquette out of curiosity for a man so unique, accomplished and complex. Who knew that it would eventually help tell Al's story? Serendipity must have played a hand, again.

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**FIRST REHEARSALS IN AUGUST SIGNAL START-UP OF REP’S 2017/18 SEASON**

The first 'First Rehearsals' signal the beginning of The Rep's new season of plays on its three stages.

Friends of The Rep volunteers coordinate and run First Rehearsals, which include a light lunch served to The Rep's staff, actors and technical artists at a play's initial gathering. Following the lunch, all hear insights about the upcoming play.

First Rehearsals’ initial 2017/18 season dates are Tuesday, August 15, and Tuesday, August 29. Preparations begin between 9:30 and 10:30 a.m. The event ends at about 12:30 p.m. There are usually eight First Rehearsals per season.

Volunteers are needed and welcome. Dust off those recipes and come join us. You will meet a great group of people and have a wonderful time.

**To get involved**, contact Kris Schmidt at 414-765-0136 or kschmidt57@wi.rr.com.
When did The Friends of The Rep get its start? A strong case can be made that its origins are more than 100 years in the making.

Milwaukee largely had spotty live, locally-produced theater prior to the 1950s. The intrepid Wisconsin Players formed in 1911 and performed in a makeshift theater on Jefferson Street downtown into the 1930s. One of its founders was Laura Sherry, an actress and director who settled in Milwaukee following a brief stage career in New York and Chicago. Sherry died in 1947, but her ambition to develop and sustain local theater lived on through the next generation of impassioned area residents who wanted to see theater flourish in Milwaukee. Included among them is Jill Heavenrich, granddaughter of Sherry.

Heavenrich was among a small group instrumental in supporting a fledging theater company in myriad ways. Their important work evolved into today’s Friends of The Rep. Heavenrich and a few others did whatever it took to give the newly formed theater company (originally called Drama, Inc.) a chance to survive. They nurtured the local professional theater group when its long-term viability was tenuous, at best. Naming themselves The Laura Sherry League, the group proved essential.

"We served dinners to the cast and crew, raised funds, cleaned, supplied props and even served as extras in the productions," said Heavenrich.

Doing shows at the former Fred Miller Theater at 2842 North Oakland Avenue, the company was tittering on financial insolvency in the early 1950s. With nowhere else to turn, Heavenrich sent an urgent and dire message to her father who was traveling on an ocean liner. The intrepid Drama, Inc. would disband unless working capital could be secured. Heavenrich’s father wired $10,000 and the season went on.

What are one of the key ways that theater companies distinguish themselves and elevate their brand?

According the Brent Hazelton, Milwaukee Rep Associate Artist Director and Director of New Play Development, it’s advancing and staging new, original works. Hazelton spoke to The Friends of The Rep Board members at a recent meeting.

The Rep's goal, Hazelton said, is to introduce new works written for The Rep on each of the three stages. He pointed to the recent successes of *Five Presidents*, *Liberace!* and *American Song*; each was written specifically for The Rep.

A generation ago, the late Rep actor/writer Larry Shue’s *The Nerd* and *The Foreigner* received their first staging at The Rep. Both continue to play to world-wide audiences. A local favorite, *The Foreigner* was back on the Powerhouse stage in late 2016.

Hazelton said there are several new plays that The Rep is developing; all in various stages. It typically takes at least three years for a Rep commissioned work to go from concept to opening night.

Among the new works that Hazelton highlighted are plays about Milwaukee’s Summerfest, Les Paul (the late Waukesha native and one of the pioneers of the solid-body electric guitar, which made the sound of rock and roll possible) and the infamous 1917 bombing of a downtown Milwaukee police station.
"It seemed like we were moving from crisis to crisis," she said.

Through the company's early years it survived using a "star system," where a nationally recognized actor was cast in the lead. Becoming Milwaukee Repertory Theater in 1963, it also began to work with a company of actors that would form its core players. In 1968, as The Rep left the east side for a 19-year run at the Todd Wehr Theater downtown, Heavenrich stepped away from her active involvement.

"My interest was always in starting and nurturing the organization along," she said.

Through all the changes and growth, Heavenrich remains a Rep patron. She used to know many of those attending the plays; today, she said, "I don't know a soul." The passing of time and the passing of the volunteer baton has inevitable results.

Heavenrich recalls an event she attended in 1950 when a representative of Minneapolis' Guthrie Theater made a presentation in Milwaukee to those yearning to start a theater group. Even then, the Guthrie was a regional powerhouse, the envy of many like-minded cities.

"Not a lot of us thought it was possible to raise the dollars to start something of similar quality," she said.

The resolve of Heavenrich and other ardent volunteers would send the neophyte theater, which had more hope than resources, on path to today. In 2017 The Rep is recognized among the nation's leading theaters.

"The Rep's work is as good as anything, anywhere," she said.

Among the reasons The Rep has a national reputation for excellence and innovation is the new plays it develops. Five Presidents is among the recent plays that have been developed for The Rep. (Brit Whittle, Steve Sheridan and Jeff Steitzer. Photo by Tim Fuller)