

## **The Resilience of The Rose**

### **Q&A Excerpts from Majic 100.1 Radio Interview Aired September 15,2024**

**Gilda Stanbery: Welcome to Monroe Today. I'm Gilda Stanbery, your host and the director of the City of Forsyth Convention & Visitors Bureau. And with us today, we have Rachel Hunter, who is the president of The Backlot Players. Welcome.**

Rachel Hunter: Thank you so much.

**GS: With the recent fire, I think it's the perfect opportunity to talk about the resilience of The Rose and the Backlot Players and tell our listeners what's going on.**

RH: The fire was definitely a big thing for us with Branded Starr being our next door neighbor and of course they suffered so much in the fire but for us, we were fortunate that the structural damage isn't quite as bad. We did take a lot of smoke and water damage and have some areas we're going to have to fix up before we can move back into our theater again.

**GS: Do you know the extent yet?**

RH: Not fully, not yet. Insurance is coming out to do an inspection. The smoke in the building was so bad the night of the fire that the firefighters told us that there was no way we could be going into the upper part of our theater because the smoke was so thick. But we definitely know the front corner of our building closest to Branded Starr was hit hard with water. There's flooding in the bathroom that ruined the flooring and the ceiling. I know that the last fire, when the Grits Cafe burned in 2012, hit us hard. We had to get all of our costumes, the stage curtains, the carpets and the seats because the smoke permeated into everything that was fabric. I definitely think checking on the structure also to make sure that the brick wall is still in a stable condition.

**GS: One of the things that you were telling me about was the wall on the Grits Cafe side.**

RH: Yes, our building was gifted to us in 1999 by Dr. & Mrs. Cummings and it was basically just the brick walls; there wasn't even a roof so we had to build everything from the brick walls inward. We had to install a firewall between us and the Grits Cafe since it's a restaurant and that really helped in the 2012 fire. Also whoever built those brick walls back in the day did a great job! We'd also like to send our sincere thanks to the local firefighters and other first responders who were there to help keep the Rose safe.

**GS: And what was the first production in the Rose?**

RH: It was called the Backlot Country Showcase. It was a group of Monroe County talent who performed some good country music. And it was also a, "hey, we've got the first steps to our building!" Because by that time we had finished our lobby and a stage. We didn't even have our seats, just risers with folding chairs. That was really where everything changed, having that moment of, "hey, this is a new era for us as the Backlot Players." We actually have a home to work out of.

**GS: The Backlot Players were formed when?**

RH: The Backlot Players were formed in 1995 by a group of people who wanted to bring a community theater group to Forsyth and Monroe County. Our first production was Scrooge, The

Stingiest Man in Town, which is a musical retelling of A Christmas Carol. And we called ourselves nomads for quite a few years because we would travel, and use whatever space was available to us. We did shows at Tift College, in the Roberts Chapel auditorium, in the old Board of Education auditorium, we even did shows in the cafeteria at Hubbard. And then we were able to establish a permanent home at the Rose Theater in 2004.

**GS: I'm correct in saying you kind of grew up in the theater. Your mom was one of the founding members of The Backlot Players?**

RH: Yes, Judy Hunter. She always loved theater. So she was like, well, I'm gonna go audition and of course having five young kids, she would say, "Y'all are coming too, if I'm going, you're going." I just remember growing up in the theater, all the different shows and it became a passion. The Backlot Players are family. There's so much that happens during a show to get it ready that you spend all this time with these people. I love the theater and everything that goes along with it.

**GS: I can imagine though for the kids that may help develop self-confidence and learn how to talk to people and work together and kind of overcoming some shyness.**

RH: Oh, absolutely. Theater gives you this ability to be someone else, to step outside yourself for a while and that can be freeing. I was a shy kid but now I'm a nurse and I talk to people I don't know all day, every day and I think I have my years in theater to thank for that confidence. And it definitely builds creativity too, you have come up with the little things that make the character you're playing unique.

**GS: Absolutely, it's wonderful. What are you planning to do about conducting auditions and rehearsals?**

RH: We reached out to you and to the local Board of Education. We talked to them and fortunately, Dr. Finch and the school board, they're helping us. We'll be able to have our next production at the Board of Education auditorium. So that has been great, at least we have a space to actually get on the stage and do the show but we will have to figure out where we're having auditions for our next show. Our next show will actually be the musical Scrooge the Stingiest Man in Town. For our 30th anniversary we're bringing back the first show we ever did as a group.

**GS: 30 years...**

RH: I know! It has been a long time that we have been doing this. And we have our monthly meetings and you all said we could use the CVB meeting room. And we're very grateful for that as it has helped us out a lot. Fortunately, the community of Forsyth and Monroe County are so welcoming and wonderful and we've had a great response after the fire.

**GS: I've always found it to be very welcoming and very embracing.**

RH: Oh absolutely! I grew up here in Forsyth and I couldn't really picture living anywhere else. It's just that wonderful of a community. Something happens and people step up and say, okay, what can we do to help? I love that. You know, when we have had evacuees come to town and all and the people get together to make sure they have what they need.

**GS: Yes! You embrace each other and you find a way.**

RH: Exactly! For us, the show must go on as the saying goes. We know how to make things work.

**GS: You said 30 years. What have you all done to kind of showcase or highlight the 30 years?**

RH: For our 30th season, we have a fundraising campaign called 30 for 30. People can always sponsor shows or even our season if they'd like but we made it even easier this year! If you donate \$30 then you're a season sponsor! And it's been great because some people don't realize what the upfront costs are of putting on a show when it comes to purchasing the rights, building sets, renting or making costumes and getting props.

**GS: I also know that with theater no matter what your talent you can use them.**

RH: Exactly! We are always looking for volunteers. If you don't want to be on the stage, there is so much that goes on behind the scenes too. From the minute we decide what shows we're already figuring out just what sort of volunteer power it's going to take to pull them off.

**GS: If somebody does want to volunteer or they have some ideas or want to make a contribution, how can they get in touch?**

RH: You can go to our website, [thebacklotplayers.org/](http://thebacklotplayers.org/) and there will be information about volunteering, purchasing tickets and even a brief history of the Rose Theater itself.

**GS: Let's talk about what's coming up.**

RH: Our next show that's in the middle of production now is called Amy's Wish.

**GS: What's Amy's Wish about?**

RH: Amy's Wish is the story of a senior citizen couple who are newlyweds. They're moving into their new apartment together but what they don't realize is their building is on top of the Fountain of Youth. Amy takes a drink from the water and she wakes up the next day and is now 19 years old. It's kind of a romantic comedy.

**GS: You're good about putting messages out for the community on social media and keeping your website updated so people can get accurate information.**

RH: We also have the option on our website to sign up for our email newsletter or even our physical mailing list. Anytime we have an event coming up we send out the information ahead of time.

**GS: Rachel, just to recap, there are lots of ways to help the Rose Theater. The Rose is still going strong and like they say, the show must go on!**

RH: Yes! We love to have new faces join us for meetings, set building, acting, the whole nine yards.

**GS: As someone who promotes this community to the outside world the Rose is truly a gem in our community. That building has been used for entertainment since the early 1900s.**

RH: It has a great history and we were so happy that we could get the space and keep it as a theater for the community.

**GS: I love its resilience. I love the fact that it is the community at its best. Thank you, Rachel.**