

KAREN'S CORNER



Stories of the people, places, and history of Eagle Bay written by Karen Loerke and published in the Eagle Eye and saved on the Eagle Bay Website at <https://www.eaglebaybc.ca/history>.

Reflections of Hamsters Part 2

As promised in the August edition of Karen's Corner, Part 2 of the Hamsters' story continues with the productions and people who kept community theatre thriving in Eagle Bay from 2000 onward.

During these years, Rod Dale played an important role as both a director and actor. When selecting a production, Rod would pore over catalogues, considering different possibilities before settling on a story to bring to life. He did not see himself as a traditional director or micromanager. Instead, he described himself as an organizer who allowed the actors' creativity to develop.

The Hamsters remained an inclusive group. People could come to rehearsals, choose a role and join the production without hesitation. Rod did not want to turn anyone away. If more people wanted to act than there were available parts, roles could be divided or new characters added. This relaxed approach seemed to work well and reflected the welcoming spirit of the group.

Rehearsals were generally held twice a week. While the actors learned their parts, many other volunteers quietly took responsibility for the stage, sets, lighting, sound, costumes, makeup, prompting, meals, ticket sales and cleanup. The annual productions were truly community efforts.

Productions From 2000 Onward

The following productions have been identified through surviving programs and the memories of those involved. There are some gaps in the records, and anyone with additional programs, photographs or information is encouraged to share them.

- Girls Must Talk and Father Keeps House, May 11 and 12, 2001
- A Thing of Beauty and A Baby for Brenda, May 3 and 4, 2002
- Happily Never After and Wanted: One Groom, 2003
- The Ratcatcher's Daughter, a Wild West comedy melodrama, date unknown
- Dirty Work on the Trail, set in a Pony Express station in Kamloops, May 13, 14 and 15, 2005
- Shootout at the Roaring Gulch Hotel, a comedy featuring a sheriff, a villain and a villainess, May 12, 13 and 14, 2006
- Woman in White, a Victorian drama in which virtue ultimately triumphs, May 3, 4, 5 and 6, 2007



KAREN'S CORNER (ON'T

- Chateau La Roach, described as a cross between Fawlty Towers and Inspector Clouseau, 2008
- Southern Hospitality, the story of three sisters trying to save their cherished town of Fayro, Texas, May 14, 15, 16 and 17, 2009
- Dearly Beloved, May 13, 14, 15 and 16, 2010
- Dearly Departed, a dark-humour play about one family's funeral arrangements, May 12, 13, 14 and 15, 2011
- Red Velvet Cake War, believed to have been performed May 3, 4, 5 and 6, 2012
- Rex's Exes, May 2, 3 and 4, 2014
- Farce of Nature, May 1, 2 and 3, 2015
- Farce of Habit, set at a fishing lodge in the Ozarks with an axe murderer on the loose, May 25, 26 and 27, 2018
- The Odd Couple, featuring one character who is messy and unconcerned and another who is compulsively tidy, 2019. This production was directed by John Edry.
- Hamlette Reader's Theatre, directed by Anne Harvey, 2021
- Check Please!, a small dinner-theatre production that brought live theatre back following the pandemic, June 10, 11 and 12, 2022. This production was directed by John Edry.





KAREN'S CORNER (ON'T

Memorable Performers and Moments

Rod considered Adele Bartels one of the stars of the Hamsters' productions. He also remembered Al Houston, joking that no one would have guessed a banker would also be such a good actor.

Bill and Judy Pobuda were also memorable performers. Bill would sing and, if he forgot his lines, sometimes make them up on the spot. This could confuse Al Houston, whose mind was described as being as sharp as a steel trap. The unexpected changes occasionally set the actors off course, but no one seemed to mind. The mistakes often made the performances even more entertaining for the audience.

Rod's mother-in-law, Jos Wynne, also appeared in the productions. Jos had participated in amateur theatre in England, so acting was already in her blood. If she did not have a role, she helped behind the scenes. Jane Dale also joined the fun, including playing a nun in *Farce of Habit*. One of the memories that continued to draw laughter was Al Houston's grand entrance wearing red underwear.



The playful titles of the productions gave audiences a good idea of what to expect: an evening of comedy, community and entertainment.

The People Behind the Productions

The success of the Hamsters depended upon far more than the people appearing on stage. Lorne Ebenstiner of Hummingbird Bay recognized the need for a larger stage. Together with Al Shirley, he devoted many hours to expanding and improving the stage, lighting and props. Allen Randell operated the soundboard, Pat Payne handled prompting, Bonnie Flatla did makeup, and Rollie Payne helped manage the set, lighting and artistry.

Terilee Schnell made many of the costumes used in the plays over the years, while her husband Henry recorded and photographed the productions. Other community members donated props, created curtains and provided wigs and costume pieces.

Bonnie Flatla started the Friends of the Hamsters, whose members supported ticket sales, kitchen duties and the many other jobs required to run a production. Volunteers regularly stepped in without being asked, often anticipating what needed to be done.



KAREN'S CORNER (ON'T

The surviving programs contain many acknowledgements to kitchen staff, servers, stage crews and other helpers. One program thanked the Eagle Bay Community Association members who supplied the numerous volunteers who enabled audiences to enjoy a good meal while supporting the production. Another thanked the audience, noting that without them, the Hamsters would have no one “to ham it up for.”

In 2004, special thanks were given to Doris and Bruce, owners of the Eagle Bay Store, who sold tickets for community events.

Dinner and a Show

Food was part of the Hamsters' experience from the beginning. In the early years, the actors helped prepare and serve food to the audience. As the productions grew, more volunteers became involved in organizing the meals.

One 2004 program thanked Gaetane Shirley, the Friends of the Hamsters and the “lady Thespians” who helped in the kitchen and behind the bar. In later years, Lynne Hansen organized volunteers to cook, serve and clean up, allowing the actors to concentrate on their performances.

The meals, kitchen crews and servers were not separate from the productions. They helped turn each performance into a community evening rather than simply a play.



The Audience Joined the Fun

Hamsters productions were often interactive. Programs invited audience members to groan, catcall or stamp their feet if they found some of the jokes a little weak, with one important instruction: “Just make sure you laugh!”

During *The Ratcatcher's Daughter*, the audience was encouraged to hiss and boo the villain and respond with “ohs” and “ahs” when the lovely heroine appeared. This fit the tradition of pantomime, where the audience was expected to boo the villain, cheer the hero and shout warnings to the performers.

The relationship between the actors and audience was an important part of every production. Forgotten lines, unexpected entrances and improvised responses often became some of the funniest and most memorable moments of the evening.





KAREN'S CORNER (ON'T

A Community Production

The Hamsters brought together actors, directors, builders, cooks, servers, costume makers, technical crews and audiences. Some people took leading roles, while others worked quietly behind the scenes. Each contribution helped create more than three decades of community theatre in Eagle Bay.

The productions changed over time, and different people stepped forward to direct and organize them. What remained consistent was the willingness to welcome participants, share the work and enjoy the inevitable surprises of amateur theatre.

The names found in the programs tell only part of the story. Many more people helped carry sets, prepare meals, sell tickets, wash dishes, find props, sew costumes and clean the Hall after the audience had gone home. Together, they made the Hamsters a memorable part of Eagle Bay's history.

Author's Note

Many of the recollections in this article were shared by Rod Dale during a conversation with Karen shortly before his passing on August 19. We are grateful for his help in preserving this chapter of the Hamsters' history.

