

Entertainment.....Gem Theater.....Local

The Gem Players Presents

*Showtime at First Baptist*

The Gem Players will open Ron Osborne's dramatic comedy *Showtime at First Baptist* on September 2, 3, 4, 9, 10, 11, 16, 17, 18 at 7:30 p.m. and September 5 and 12 at 2:30 p.m. at the historic Gem Theater in Etowah. *Showtime* is a sequel to the Player's popular production of *First Baptist of Ivy Gap* produced in 2008 where the ladies were helping with the WWII effort. This time the ladies of First Baptist have the backdrop of the 1970's and the Vietnam War to mold the events in their lives.

The play opens with First Baptist of Ivy Gap's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary picnic. It was a smashing success, except for one little thing; a bolt of lightning struck the church's steeple, igniting a fire that destroyed the sanctuary, the organ and sends the pastor to the hospital. The women of the church decide to raise funds for the rebuilding by planning an evening of entertainment designed to showcase the congregation's talent. The fellowship hall of the church becomes the "combat zone"

where the women commiserate and try to put things back together again.

The character of Edith, the pastor's wife, is played by Haroldean Thompson. Edith and her husband Charlie are retiring from the church but it is difficult for her to leave her friends of 32 years. When disaster strikes her life she has questions to be answered and decisions to make. Although Thompson is a newcomer to the Gem she takes charge of her character and the stage.

Another newcomer to the Gem is Laura Rust. Rust is playing the role of the church organist, Mae Ellen. Mae Ellen is still trying to fulfill her dream of going to Hollywood or Nashville. She is an "old hippie" struggling with questions about her career and marriage. Rust shows us the vulnerable side of her character and isn't afraid to do so.

The character of Olene in *Showtime at First Baptist* is played by Cleveland native, Lou Horner. Olene has just returned from Las Vegas where she worked in "show biz" for 25 years. She is just in time for the 100<sup>th</sup> celebration and wants everyone to

know how well she has done in her career. Horner plays Olene with no reserves and no regrets.

Elaine Baker is another Cleveland native that is no newcomer to the Gem stage. Baker was last scene in the Player's sold out mystery dinner theater production of *Death and Taxes*. She played the town mayor in that comedy and is again portraying an influential character whose son is fighting in Viet Nam. Baker's role as Lucille has very serious moments but she let's the audience have fun with her too.

Sarah Vest appears as Annie, a very young wife of Lucille's son. Annie writes letters to newspaper in protest of the war. The conflict between Lucille and Annie are painful to watch sometimes since Lucille thinks questioning the war in not acceptable. Vest was last see at the Gem in the family classic, *Little Women* and is also from Cleveland.

The only original cast member from *First Baptist of Ivy Gap* to return for this sequel is Virginia Orr. She was also last seen in *Death and Taxes* as the befuddled secretary to the mayor. Orr plays the role of Vera and is the "rock of the church since the Old

Testament was New"! Vera softens throughout the course of the play from being the ultra conservative Baptist church woman to a loyal friend. She also becomes the comic relief for the show.

*Showtime at First Baptist* is about changes and these six diverse women challenge institutions as well as each other through the course of the play. Along the way there are laughs to be shared, battles to be fought, love to be won, relationships to be mended, and losses to be grieved. In the end the audience will understand why they call themselves *Charlie Angels*.

*Showtime at First Baptist* is directed by Rick Parker with lightning design by Ruth Sowers. Set design by George Rose with costumes by Rebecca Brownlow.

Tickets for *Showtime at First Baptist* are \$12 for adults and children over 12 years of age. Tickets may be purchased in advance at the Town Squire Menswear on Keith Street in Cleveland, Southern Heritage Antique Store on Tennessee Avenue in Etowah or at the box office one hour prior to the show. For more information call 423-263-3270 or visit our website at [www.gemplayers.com](http://www.gemplayers.com).

