

Theatre of Tomorrow serves up a gem

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Jordan Coffel (left) talks to his best friend during a scene in Theatre of Tomorrow's *What Not to Expect*, which ran at Dunnville Community Theatre Monday night.

Carl has a problem -three actually

His first is his overly emotional, pregnant wife. He spends most of his time getting yelled at for bringing her the wrong juice, allegedly calling her fat and taking lamps to the head for other verbal snafus. His second problem is his mother-in-law, who has hated Carl since the day they met and can often be heard ordering him around and calling him "self-centred." His third problem is his well-intentioned but daft best friend, who advises Carl to remedy his marital arguments by throwing things, in order to distract his wife long enough to give him time to run away.

It all amounts to Carl feeling discouraged. This is just not what he expected marital bliss to be, he says, going so far to wish men were the ones obliged to carry pregnancies.

Such is the plot of *What Not to Expect*, which ran Monday night at Dunnville Community Theatre.

All the expectations in the world couldn't have prepared Carl, played by Jordan Coffel, for nine months of pregnancy Hell. He reads that the best thing for a husband to do during his wife's pregnancy is strive to fill all of her needs, so she can remain happy.

"Too bad the book didn't tell me how many of those needs there were going to be!" he quips.

Many fathers before him have found the same, while mothers in the audience saw the humour in Jessica Palmer's portrayal of Carl's wife. Both lead actors brought many laughs from an audience who've been there, done that.

Though *What Not to Expect* was full of comedy, it imparted an important lesson by the end, when Carl and his wife become first-time parents. Carl is inspired by a nurse who tells him that if life always played out to expectations, it would get boring.

The play was produced by teenage actors, director Katie Best, playwright Emily Vint, producer, set director Cassandra Robinson and technicians involved in the Theatre of Tomorrow, a no-cost program that allows teens from Dunnville and the surrounding area to learn all aspects of play production. The program is designed for teens to learn new skills, work in a team atmosphere and learn to take pride in their skills by presenting the play to the public, notes information on Dunnville Community Theatre's website, www.dunnvillecommunitytheatre.com.

Palmer said she received an important lesson in character acting and hard work.

Playing a pregnant woman was "a lot of hard work," she said, adding wearing a pregnant belly puts "more weight on you than normal."

As for being onstage, she said Maloney told the young actors to get into character and "If you make a fool of yourself, it's not you. It's just your character."

Her favourite thing about this effort was getting to nag Coffel, as Carl, and seeing people's reaction.

Seventeen-year-old director Katie Best said she had never directed people before and that it was "like going from student to teacher."

Seventeen-year-old Cassandra Robinson designed the play's set and said she "had so much fun" being involved in the Theatre of Tomorrow. Robinson moves on to college to take Graphic Design.

As for mentor Mike Maloney, he said he is proud of what the teens have accomplished. "They've pulled it off. They did it and I'm so proud of them," he said Monday night, adding "there is such a wealth of talent (in the area)."

The cast's experience and memories, along with the audience's reaction and the looks on the teens' faces at the end of the night is "everything. That makes every hour worth it."

Those involved in Theatre of Tomorrow need not have any prior experience in theatre, said mentor Mike Maloney. Students pick the play, organize themselves into production teams and present the play to the public. Dunnville Community Theatre provides mentors.

Last year, Maloney approached Dr. Reza Kazemi, a volunteer on DREAM's board of directors and proposed they work together. Theatre of Tomorrow is now a module within the DREAM program at Dunnville Secondary School. Teens do not have to be a member of DREAM to be part of the Theatre of Tomorrow, said Maloney, adding future plans include a 15-minute presentation by the Theatre of Tomorrow in March as part of the River Arts Festival.

Meetings are held after school from 3:30 to 5 p.m. on a bi-weekly basis to start and increase to once weekly or as deemed necessary by the students as opening night nears.