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POPLAR BLUFF – Center Stage, the college/community theatre group at Three Rivers College, will produce the play “Steel Magnolias” April 13-15 at the Tinnin Fine Arts Center.

The play, written by Robert Harling and first produced off-Broadway in 1987, is widely recognized due the 1989 film adaptation starring Sally Field, Julia Roberts, Dolly Parton, Shirley MacLaine and Olympia Dukakis.

“This production is a lot of fun,” said Shelly Dunn, an English teacher at Poplar Bluff Junior High who is also active in the Stage Company and the drama ministries with First Baptist Church of Poplar Bluff. Dunn will portray salon owner Truvy Jones in the upcoming production.

“I’ve really enjoyed getting to know the ladies in the cast,” said Dunn. “They are so much fun to work with. This is a great script anyway, so it’s a huge bonus to get to hang out with this cast.”

“‘Steel Magnolias’ portrays the necessity of relationships among women, and the fulfillment that results from those relationships,” said Patti Thornton, Executive Director of Women’s Ministries at the General Baptist Church of Poplar Bluff, who will play the role of town socialite and gossip Clairee Belcher.

“Clairee is full of life but just reserved enough to maintain her social reputation,” said

Thornton, whose husband Wilbur serves on the Three Rivers College Board of Trustees. “However, there’s nothing reserved about her affection for those she loves. She feels most vital when filling her place in her circle of friends.”

Center Stage was founded in fall 2011 with the goal of bringing students, college employees and community members together to produce live theatre, which provides both local entertainment and hands-on experience for Three Rivers students who are interested in dramatic arts.

Briana Freeland , a Three Rivers student and a pharmacy technician at Physician’s Park, plays young hairstylist Annelle Dupuy.

“She starts out as this shy and timid ‘new girl’ in town, then transforms into a confident, over-the-top Christian throughout the course of the play,” said Freeland. “I wanted to audition because I missed the stage and the rush of performing. I’ve been in several shows, but this is by far my favorite cast and character.”

“I wanted to audition because Tim Thompson, the show director, reached out to me as an old school mate from both PBHS and Southeast Missouri State theatre clubs,” said Subrina Berger, who will be playing M’Lynn Eatenton.

“I love every character in this story,” said Berger, who works as a marketing manager for the Black River Coliseum. “I believed there would be a part to challenge me after twelve long years away from the stage. M’Lynn struggles with difficulties within her own family and carries the burden of her daughter’s medical condition like an Olympic torch.”

Subrina is married to River Radio personality Chris Berger, and regularly volunteers with different downtown Poplar Bluff events.

Much of the play’s comic relief comes from cranky neighbor Ouiser Boudreaux, portrayed by Kathy Richardson, computer system administrator at Three Rivers College and mother of state representative Todd Richardson (R-Poplar Bluff).

“Ouiser has always been my favorite character in this show,” said Richardson, who was active in high school theatre in her hometown of Kennett in shows like “Bye Bye Birdie” and “Man of La Mancha.” “Ouiser is a mean, grumpy, eccentric millionaire with a fiery wit. She has some hilarious lines, which makes it really fun to play the character.”

Rounding out the cast is the writer as Shelby, the newlywed daughter of M’Lynn living

with Type 1 diabetes, is Dexter native Megan Keathley.

“I feel confident that the audience will see and feel the immense chemistry between the performers,” said director Thompson. “I think the audience will get caught up in this story, in the best way. This is the fifth time I’ve directed this show, and I feel that this is the strongest cast. I’m just amazed at how the cast has melded together to create this very polished, very real and honest performance.”

Tickets are \$10 for adults and \$5 for children, students and senior citizens. Tickets are on sale now at the Poplar Bluff Chamber of Commerce, the Three Rivers Business/Financial Services Office, and will also be sold at the door before each performance.

Showtimes are 7 p.m. April 13 and 14, with a 2 p.m. matinee on Sunday April 15. Doors will open approximately a half-hour before each performance.

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