

Persistence pays for winning playwright

'Althea's Well' won theater prize for Ruth Tyndall Baker

By RACHAEL VACHON
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"When I was a little girl I put on skits in a garage at the neighbor's house."

Ruth Tyndall Baker has had a long history of acting and writing plays. From a young age she has been in close proximity to the theater in a variety of roles. From serving as a prompter and watching plays throughout high school to becoming a playwright, Baker is adept in her knowledge of the theater.



Baker

Recently, Baker was recognized for winning first place in the 3rd Annual Northeast Indiana Playwright Festival.

"I was thrilled when it was chosen," Baker said.

Her play, titled "Althea's Well," tells the story of a poor family who lived in Missouri during the post-depression era. Like many families, there are secrets, problems and issues the characters discover about each other that they have to work through during the course of the play. When a drifter crosses Althea's path, she shows him compassion and fulfills his desire for family. "Althea's Well" contains universal themes understood by many.

According to Baker, "Althea's Well" has been in the works for 15 years. Baker recalled that when she originally submitted her play, the director didn't think it was complex enough. Not feeling confident in her writing at the time, she put the script in a drawer. While she occasionally pulled it out and made some changes, it wasn't until she submitted it to the Civic Theatre that it received notice with few criticisms.

At the time she submitted her script, Baker remembers feeling excited and hopeful that her play was



James Del Priore portrays Alfred Kinsey in Civic Theatre's "Alive and Dead in Indiana," with Kristi Lewark as Clara.

strong and had a good message. She didn't know what her competition was like, but she remained optimistic.

Excited that "Althea's Well" will be performed as a main stage play, Baker has attended some of the rehearsals to ensure the correct portrayal of her play, as well as make any necessary adjustments, which she said have been very few.

"It's just very exciting to see the show come together, especially with the cast I have," Baker said. "They are all very experienced actors and have really gotten the most out of my script."

Throughout the process of preparing her script for production, Baker said she has fallen in love with her characters all over again. She hopes people can see the characters' qualities emerge during the course of the play.

"I hope that they [the public] get it that in any difficult situation there are always solutions," Baker said when asked what she would like to see people take away from her play. "That life is full of surprises, so it may not be the solution you think it will be."

Baker's own experience contributed to the play's structure and theme. Growing up in a loving home, she said she didn't realize till she was older and others shared their stories with her that there were "power struggles"

Winning play

What: Production of Ruth Tyndall Baker's winning play, "Althea's Well."

When: 8 p.m. Saturday and June 8 and 2 p.m. June 9

Where: Arts United Center, 303 E. Main St.

Cost: Tickets are \$24 for adults and \$16 for ages 23 and under. For tickets call 424-5220 or order online at fwcivic.org

Other 3rd Annual Northeast Indiana Playwright Festival events:

◆ "Alive and Dead in Indiana," a featured play by Michael Martone, is a series of monologues — part fact, part fiction — about famous Hoosiers such as James Dean and Colonel Sanders. Performances will be at 8 p.m. Friday and June 9; 2 p.m. Sunday and June 10 and 7:30 p.m. June 7. Tickets are \$24 for adults, \$16 for ages 23 and under, and \$20 for the senior Sunday matinee.

◆ Second-place winner "Hands Under the Table," by Theron RD Steinke is at 4 p.m. Saturday. Tickets are \$10.

◆ Third-place winner "Spring at the Willowbrook Inn" by Douglas C. Evans and Jonathan Van Dyke is at noon Saturday. Tickets are \$10.

found in some family relationships. This led to an interest in psychology, which she said is an important element for a playwright. Looking back,



Courtesy photos

Susan Domer plays Althea Wheeler and Brad Beauchamp is Carl Thomas in Civic Theatre's production of "Althea's Well."

she has seen how her writing has matured along with her.

Baker also has submitted plays the previous two years for the Northeast Indiana Playwright Festival. Both her plays, "Papillons" and "Knitters Row," won second place in the competition and received readings as a result.

Baker has also had plays produced in places such as New York, Chicago, Nashville, St. Louis and Houston, to name a few. She also has had her plays read in New York, Chicago, Indianapolis and Muncie. Baker has participated

in workshops and received awards for her plays as well.

Baker also has submitted her works to the Chicago Dramatists, a group that works with new scripts and plays that haven't been produced before. She said it is an opportunity to get her work out professionally and receive helpful feedback from the audience.

After 15 years, Baker will see her work finally come alive on the Civic Theatre's stage. She is looking forward to the performance and a promising outcome.