

WCP Brings Heartbreak and Laughter in

Steel Magnolias

By **DEVON GOHDE**

WESTFIELD – For their final production of the 2024-20245 season, the Westfield Community Players (WCP) premiered Robert Harling’s *Steel Magnolias* on May 3. Directed by Linda Correll and produced by Lois Stevens, this production of *Steel Magnolias* brings the audience to tears with both heartbreak and laughter.

Set in Chinquapin, Louisiana, in the late 1980s, each scene is set in hair appointments spanning over a year at a local beauty salon, following a group of women varying in age who find solace in each other during life’s obstacles and milestones. Opening on salon owner Truvy Jones played by Rachelle Mandik hiring newcomer to town Anelle played by Jessica Musolino, they are thrown into a busy day preparing for Shelby played by Christine Storms’ wedding.

As the day goes on, regulars like the former mayor’s wife Clairee, played by Ann Minski, Shelby’s mother M’Lynn, played by Jennifer Padley, and the sharp-tongued Ouiser Boudreaux, played by Cythinia Okamoto, come to the salon and engage in conversations over local town gossip and recipes. However, as the months begin to pass, tensions rise as M’Lynn begins to worry about Shelby’s health.

Made up of a small ensemble of six actresses, this cast has outstanding chemistry throughout the play’s runtime. While each character’s relationship with the other is unique, their ability to blend makes their interactions feel realistic. As their day at the salon goes on, their bond begins to grow as they support each other through the good and bad.

Despite this small time with the group of women between each scene, this cast delivers stand-out performances, bringing depth and heart to each character. Ms. Mandik, as Truvy, takes on the role of the salon owner with warmth and comedy. Ms. Musolino’s portrayal of Anelle’s character growth is superb. Ms. Minski, as Clairee, brings the right amount of class and sassiness to her character, and Ms. Okamoto, as Ouiser, brings the smart-mouthed yet endearing character to life in her portrayal.

Ms. Storms as Shelby and Ms. Padley as M’Lynn,



LET IT SINK IN...M’Lynn (Jennifer Padley) gets ready for Anelle (Jessica Musolino) to shampoo her hair while chatting with Clairee (Ann Minski) during Westfield Community Players’ production of *Steel Magnolias*. Courtesy of Christen Holly Photography

the mother and daughter of the play, bring a complex edge to the production. As Shelby moves towards independence despite her illness affecting parts of her life, M’Lynn is scared to let go because she fears for Shelby’s well-being. Together, they portray the complexities of the characters’ bonds with authenticity and depth, bringing a powerful yet tender dynamic to the production.

Steel Magnolias is a heartwarming yet heartbreaking story about the strength of women and the complexity of female friendships. As life knocks them down, they support each other in the best way they can. During the play finale, M’Lynn, suffering from heartbreak, wonders why the men around her couldn’t handle an unspeakable loss like she did. Stating that “Men are supposed to be made of steel or something,” the core of this play shows that women are the ones made of steel despite being compared to delicate flowers like Magnolias. Always there to pick each other up and those around them while suffering, but can find solace and support in one another as life continues.

Steel Magnolias will be performed at WCP on May 10, 16, and 17 at 8 p.m. and May 11 at 2 p.m., with a benefit performance on May 9. For more information, call [\(908\) 2321221](tel:9082321221) or visit their website, www.wcptheatre.org.

