

# Theatre in the Park looks ahead

By **JOE HENDERSON**  
Special to The Olathe News

Mark Swezey is returning to Theater in the Park after an 11-year absence to direct "Sweeney Todd," the opening show of the 2012 season.



Swezey  
"I couldn't resist the opportunity to direct 'Sweeney Todd,' one of my favorites," said Swezey, who is director of the-

ater at the Jewish Community Center. "I've had my eye on it for years. I'm excited about it."

Swezey was director of theater at Shawnee Mission South High School for 25 years before he retired. At the Jewish Community Center, he produces a full schedule of musicals, plays and other cultural events in the Center's White Theatre. He previously directed 17 productions at The Theatre in the Park, the last one "Peter Pan" in 2000.

He hasn't worked in outdoor theater for more than a decade.



Hastings



Ruder

"Legally Blonde," Tammy Ruder, who will direct Disney's "Sleeping Beauty" and "The Jungle Book" as a double feature, and David Hastings, who will direct "Urinetown." Bair, himself, will direct the the season's finale, "You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown."

"Legally Blonde" will be Shaw's 17<sup>th</sup> show at The Theatre in the Park, where he has been

"It definitely will be a change. Weather can be very frustrating," he said with a chuckle. "But it will be fun and I'm very much looking forward to it."

Other directors selected by producing artistic director Tim Bair for the 2012 season are Greg Shaw, who will direct



Bair



Shaw

tertaining from start to finish. It goes 100 miles an hour all the time. It's fun because it doesn't take itself too seriously. There's always room for a show like that."

Ruder calls herself a Disney fanatic and says she is excited to work with young actors again. Ruder directed Disney's "High School Musical" in 2009 and "Annie" in 2010.

"I love being part of the op-

an actor for eight years and a director for nine. He directed "Aida," a contemporary adaptation of Giuseppe Verdi's opera, at The Theatre last season.

"Legally Blonde" is definitely a change of pace," he said. "It's fun, a high-energy show that is extremely en-

## The season

"Sweeney Todd," June 8-10 and 14-17; "Legally Blonde," June 22-24 and June 28-July 1; Disney's "Sleeping Beauty" and "The Jungle Book," July 6-8 and 12-15; "Urinetown," July 20-22 and 26-29; "You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown," Aug. 3-5 and 9-12.

portunities The Theatre provides for young actors to develop into future Broadway and Hollywood stars," she said. "The challenge of bringing two classic Disney stories to the stage is one I can't wait to tackle."

Ruder will have different casts of approximately 25 youngsters, ages 9 to 18, for each show. Each runs about an hour.

"That's the usual time for most musicals," she said. "The biggest difference for me will be coming up with two visions instead of one."

David Hastings, a theater teacher at Olathe South High School, loves the music of "Urinetown." "It seems to me the creators of 'Urinetown' are mixing musical theater and humor as a way to get us to talk about important issues," said Hastings, who last year directed "Les Misérables" at The Theatre. "I believe this is when musical theater is at its best."

Bair has directed "You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown" before.

The 2012 season includes five productions instead of the customary four, and all are being produced at The Theatre in the Park for the first time.