

To Be Determined spreads Norval star's love for theatre

By **Melanie Hennessey**
Special to The IFP



Creating To Be Determined (TBD) Theatre Co. came easily to former Norval resident Alexandra Heck, above. Her company is currently in its fifth season offering theatre performances for youth all over Ontario and eastern Canada.

A Norval native's star is rising in the dramatic arts scene.

Georgetown District High School alumna Alexandra Heck has combined her love for theatre and teaching youth to create the To Be Determined (TBD) Theatre Co.

The former local resident's company is currently in its fifth season, offering theatre performances for young audiences across Ontario and out to the east coast of Canada.

"I've worked very hard to follow my passion for theatre and youths and to never stop striving to learn more," said Heck. "I love that there's always more to do, more to try and more to challenge me in this field."

The 30-year-old first pursued post-secondary education for dramatic arts in Ontario, achieving an Honours BA in Theatre from the University of Ottawa before moving to New York City to attend the American Musical and Dramatic Academy to broaden her onstage training. She then returned to Canada and achieved her Masters in Performance Studies from the University of Toronto.

The extensive schooling gave Heck perspective on what theatre and performance can accomplish, both on and off stage. Since then she has worked as an actor, director and dramatic arts teacher.

"When I began my theatre career I thought acting would be my passion, but when I started teaching and directing dramatic arts I discovered the challenge, excitement and eventual rewards that occur in these roles," she said. "The possibility to teach a craft that I love so much myself soon became my new profession."

Heck went on to teach in private schools, workshops and festivals and designed curriculum for municipal programs. And while she enjoyed different aspects of all these roles, something was missing.

"I realized if I wanted to try it

my way, I had to take a leap and give it (my own company) a go," she said.

And from there TBD Theatre Co. was born—an eight-person company based in Guelph that offers theatre classes, workshops, summer camps and school performances. Heck—the company's artistic director—said she draws from all of her previous experiences to develop quality and creative children's programming.

"Watching the kids realize how awesome they are is so much fun to do on a daily basis," she said.

TBD Theatre Co. has toured

in Halton many times, said Heck, with their elementary school production of Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day being performed in Georgetown and Acton.

"It's such a fun piece," said Heck. "It talks a lot about resilience; you have a bad day and realize yes, things do happen, but you find strategies to get through those things."

The company has also performed at Georgetown District High School with a show about mental health, delivering Heck back to the very stage she started on as a student all those years ago.

The current show for high school and college students, *Out in the Open*, uses humour to discuss a variety of serious subjects, including homophobia, gender stereotypes, stigma and acceptance. The production was written by playwright Dave Deveau and directed by Tom Slater, both critically acclaimed Canadian artists.

"This is an incredible piece of Canadian theatre. The performance is followed by a forum theatre exercise in which the audience is invited to help find an alternative outcome or solution to scenes involving oppression or conflict," said Heck. "This allows the students to have their ideas heard and to practise what it feels like to be an ally or a catalyst for change."

With Ontario's curriculum on the above topics recently changing, *Out in the Open* has become a very timely performance, Heck said.

"I think we picked the right show at the right time," she noted. "The message of the show is universal. It's not just about sexuality; the idea is that you're accepted for who you are, no matter the race, religion, sexuality, or anything that makes you different."

While the production's comedic approach helps lighten the mood, it does seriously address some very difficult topics.

"The use of humour and the vernacular of teenagers are so important to access our target market," said Heck. "And theatre is an amazing medium. The arms-length aspect of it allows us to talk about things they might not want to talk about."

The show comes with an extensive educational package created to support school staff before the performance and continue conversations in the classroom, incorporating the topics into their lesson plans.

Out in the Open is currently booking into school boards and colleges across Ontario, including nearby Upper Grand District School Board. Heck is hopeful the Halton boards will take an interest in the show in 2016.

For more information on the To Be Determined Theatre Co. visit www.tobedeterminedtheatre.ca.

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