

‘It’s about resilience:’ Oakton play gives voice to 9/11 victims, survivors, on 25th anniversary



The Oakton College “Tribute 9/11: Ordinary People, Remarkable Stories” cast rehearsing for their Sept. 10-13 performances.(Oakton College)



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People too young to remember the day 9/11 happened and people who remember it well will be portraying real-life figures , including victims, survivors and responders, as Oakton College presents four free outdoor theater performances on the 25th anniversary of the tragedy.

Director Mary Ringstad-Gagliano, professor of speech and theater, will present “Tribute 9/11: Ordinary People, Remarkable Stories,” with an intergenerational cast on Sept. 10-13 on Oakton’s Des Plaines campus, 1600 E. Golf Rd., Des Plaines, in the outdoor courtyard, unless weather sends the show indoors.

“I knew when picking this season it was going to be the 25th anniversary of the attacks,” Ringstad-Gagliano said.

“I really wanted to do something. A lot of traditional-age students know it was something bad but have no memory of it.

“I thought it would be nice to find a piece that defines it and help them understand.”

Ringstad-Gagliano settled on a 35-minute documentary-style play by Donna Kaz that “weaves together the perspectives of 10 individuals who were separately yet directly impacted by the events of 9/11,” according to the 9/11 Memorial and Museum website.



From left: Alex Lodkin, of Northbrook, and Patricia Kelly, of Skokie, pictured reading the story of Bridget Damiano, who volunteered with the Salvation Army in the aftermath of 9/11. (Oakton College)

“For most of us, we watched it on television,” Ringstad-Gagliano said. “(The play’s characters) are people who experienced it firsthand. Their words are very powerful.

“I have a great cast and they do a great job at telling these people’s stories. People will find it not just very informative, but very moving.”

Phil Prale of Lincolnwood, an adjunct faculty member for about 10 years, plays Ray Habib, whose wife worked in the north tower of the World Trade Center and was killed during the attacks.

“He shares the story of that day and the follow-up and how it changed his life,” Prale said.

“It’s from the perspective of someone whose life was irreparably changed in a moment. He reflects on where his life was at and where he was headed. He talks about his wife’s character and manner and missing her and how substantially that changed him.”

Alex Lodkin of Northbrook, a STEM Department teaching assistant who is studying medical lab technology and music at Oakton, plays Bridget Damiano, who lost a cousin who was a financial analyst during the attacks. Damiano volunteered on a food truck throughout the recovery aftermath.



From left: Jonathan McFarlane, of Chicago, and Phil Prale, of Lincolnwood, read the story of Ray Habib, whose wife was killed on Sept. 11 while attending a meeting at the World Trade Center. (Oakton College)

“Her experience is that she has a lot of anger toward the situation,” Lodkin said. “It gave me a new outlook on the event. I knew it was really bad. I’m playing someone who lost a family member, and hearing from people who were there in those moments gave me a new perspective on it.”

Lodkin was about 9 months old when 9/11 occurred.

“I don’t have any firsthand memories or accounts,” she said. “I remember learning about it at about age 5. I was going through an airport, and I asked my mom why we had to take off our shoes. She explained all the ways security had changed.”

Patricia Kelly, a psychotherapist who lives in Skokie, plays Ann Van Hine, whose husband, a New York City firefighter, died during rescue efforts.

“He was called in right after the first plane hit. He had two teen children,” Kelly said. “What struck me is people were all experiencing this ordinary day. She owned a dance studio and stopped to check her messages.

“I know anything can happen at any point in our lives, but that’s what stood out for me. It was profoundly moving.”



Ahead of the 25th anniversary of 9/11, Oakton College invites you to go behind the scenes as local community members rehearse for “Performing Tribute 9/11: Ordinary People, Remarkable Stories,” a staged reading that gives voice to the first-hand experiences of survivors, family members, first responders and others whose lives were forever changed by the Sept. 11 attacks. (Oakton College)

Ringstad-Gagliano said that despite the tragedy, the story is “very hopeful.”

“It’s about resilience,” she said. “The characters have all found a new purpose and new way of moving forward. The scars will never heal but you find a way of moving forward. It’s uplifting. Most people will come away uplifted.”

The Sept. 10 show starts at 12:30 p.m., the Sept. 11 and 12 shows at 6 p.m., and the Sept. 13 show at 2 p.m.