

## Rosa Parks' story at the Raue Center

By Michael Martinez | Contributor January 31, 2013 1:16pm

Rosa Parks' compelling life is the subject of an upcoming show coming to the Raue Center for the Arts.

The touring Mad River Theater Works company, based in Zanesfield, Ohio, will present "Walk On: The Story of Rosa Parks" which tells Parks' story from childhood to the moment she refused to give up her seat and move to the designated colored section on a Montgomery, Ala., bus on Dec. 1, 1955. That set off the Montgomery bus boycott — both key events in the civil rights movement, that culminated with President Lyndon B. Johnson signing the Civil Rights Act in 1964.

"We like to say we make our shows for people from the cradle to the grave," said Chris Westhoff, a managing director for the company. "Our main audience is students in third through eighth grade. Part of our success is that we don't dumb down plays for the children. We encourage them to follow adult thought."

One of the show's themes is that one person who is willing to take action can make a difference. Parks' action proves that and Westhoff believes that resonates with audiences.

"This is a story of how her act of was a planned act of protest," he said. "That one person can make that big of a difference and help create change. That is something that the audience identifies with."

For actress Jo Frannye Reichert, who plays Rosa Parks in the production, she hopes that the audience understands more about the woman and ponders her motivation. Reichert helped the company develop that role when the show was created in 2007.

"I could play (Parks) for the next 30 years and I still might not know why she refused to give up her seat that day," Reichert said. "But I hope people understand that while she was a dignified person and a quiet person, those who knew her well knew she had a fiery side. There were a lot of factors that brought her to that moment."

She added that she is proud to play one of the giant figures in American history.

"It is quite an honor at such a time in our history with the second inauguration of our president who is of African-American descent," she said. "I hope when I am up there I represent Rosa in spirit."