

## **‘Wonderful Life’ comes to life on stage**

By JAMI KUNZER – [jkunzer@shawmedia.com](mailto:jkunzer@shawmedia.com)

Williams Street Repertory will bring to life the classic “It’s a Wonderful Life,” but the production company will tell the story in its own creative way.

“It’s a Wonderful Life: The Radio Play” opens at 9 p.m. Nov. 23 at the Raue Center for the Arts, 26 N. Williams St., Crystal Lake. The show runs through Dec. 14.

Those involved describe it as a sort of “play within a play.”

“It’s Christmas Eve 1949, and a group of radio players are getting together to perform the classic, ‘It’s a Wonderful Life,’ ” said T. Paul Lowry, Raue Center and Williams Street Repertory’s producing director. “The audience gets to see the behind-the-scenes antics, chaos, craziness...”

“We took a bit of creative license with it,” he said.

The cast of 13, including three child actors, all have back stories that they, for the most part, wrote on their own.

Each came up with their own names for their roles as actors playing the “It’s a Wonderful Life” characters.

“We wanted to focus on the storytelling aspect, how these people are coming together to tell this story,” Lowry said.

The actors and actresses must deal with mishaps, last-minute cast changes when some do not show up because of a winter storm and other conflicts and drama.

A nun bringing three children from a local orphanage to the studio to take part in the show ends up being roped in to read a part, said Kate Hein, who has acted in numerous Williams Street productions but serves as assistant director for “It’s a Wonderful Life.”

“There’s a lot of chaos, and the audience is going to be able to experience all of that with us,” she said. “It’s been a blast, a lot of fun, kind of like being behind the curtains.”

Much of that chaos is expressed through the actions of the characters as opposed to their actual words, Lowry said. The audience might not know all the exact back stories of the characters, but they will know that each character has a story.

Some radio plays become audio versions of the films they’re based on, and that can be entertaining, Lowry said. But Williams Street did not want to simply replicate the story, hoping instead to take it to another level, he said.

The production should appeal to those who have seen the film repeatedly as well as those who are experiencing the story for the first time, he said.

“I think it’s going to be a unique production,” Lowry said. “I don’t think many people will have seen, ‘It’s a Wonderful Life’ quite like this.”

**“IT’S A WONDERFUL LIFE: A RADIO PLAY”**

**WHEN:** Opens at 9 p.m. Nov. 23 and runs through Dec. 14

**WHERE:** Raue Center for the Arts, 26 N. Williams St., Crystal Lake

**INFO:** [www.rauecenter.org](http://www.rauecenter.org) or [www.wsrep.org](http://www.wsrep.org), or call 815-356-9212