

# Enjoyable Experiences At Franklin's New Arts Venue

By Heather Makechnie  
Beacon staff

The Middle New Hampshire, operating from the Franklin Opera House, claims that its mission is: "To nourish the soul. To indulge the human spirit. To be the destination for distinctive, quality arts and entertainment for the middle New Hampshire region and beyond."

Jim Hamel, Executive Director of the Middle New Hampshire, says that the center tries to approach patrons as guests, not customers, and strives to give them a meaningful, personalized experience. He says, "We really want to get it right. We are working hard to be the arts center for Andover residents. Please come and 'test drive' us."

I decided to take him up on the offer. In the hot, sultry days of July 2009, I began to attend a series of events that I thought might highlight the Franklin Opera House's capabilities. My initial exposure to this marvelous facility was sitting front and center to watch Gilbert and Sullivan's operetta *The Pirates of Penzance*. It was a fabulous beginning.

My goal in making the test drive was not to critique the productions, but rather the venue. My look-see started with parking. To be honest, I hate driving through Franklin. Stop-go-stop-go-stop-and-wait. I had an image of trying to find a parking spot and ending up walking from Grevior's back to the opera house once I had squeezed into a spot somewhere on Central Street.

What I didn't realize is that there is parking for well over 100 cars in the old mill section along the river. Even in the pouring rain of that evening I was able to park so close that I barely got wet as I

dashed to the theater. When it was time to drive away, there were three different exits, and getting out of the lot was not a problem. Police are on hand for all events where alcohol is served.

Sitting in an old musty brick building, built in 1893, would be creepy, wouldn't it? That's what I thought, but not so! The comfortable, individual, portable seats are capacious even for my generous torso. The pre-show ambiance made me feel like an important guest. Hard to explain, but a lot of it had to do with the sincere and hospitable welcome I received from all of the staff and volunteers.

The air-conditioned room was most pleasant, however muggy and oppressive it was outdoors. The sound quality of the hall is outstanding. From the moment the lights went down, I was transported to a place and time outside my normal ken. When the lights came back up, I realized that I had been "away," a feeling that stayed with me for a few days.

In speaking with the members of the cast (a community theater group from Eastern New Hampshire) I heard over and over how much they appreciated the hall, and how easy it had been to deal with the staff.

This first taste left me wanting another. The musical comedy *All Shook Up*, performed by the Franklin Footlight Theater, was a gas. This time I sat at the back of the hall. The sound was still clear as a bell. Because of the seating arrangement there is no straining to find a line of sight between a pair of ears ahead of you. In fact, there is almost nowhere in the room that doesn't have a

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# LOCAL CLUB BECOMES 1920s SPEAKEASY

New London Outing Club press release  
Local Gangster Harry Hyde is sure to stir up some trouble at Trixie's, a.k.a. the New London Outing Club, on Saturday, March 13, at 6 PM. In fact, he might even get himself killed that night.

Yes, you heard right. On the evening of March 13, the New London Outing Club, located at the Outing Club's Indoor Center at 114 Cougar Court in New London, will host the comedy mystery dinner *Bullets in the Bathtub*. The gym will be transformed into a 1920s speakeasy straight out of the days of Prohibition. The place will be filled with gangsters, flappers, and lots of crazy characters.

In addition to the murder mystery, the evening will include a dinner service of a three-course meal. Tickets are \$40 per person, or a table of ten for \$350. Purchase your tickets early: only 200 tickets are available for this event!

The show features Emily Lewis and Tim Thibideau, two professional actors out of Providence, Rhode Island. "Dinner theaters, where the audience is part of the show, are a lot of fun for everyone, including the actors," Emily said. "Every single performance is different, depending on the mood and attitude of the audience. The show can go in any direction."

Emily continued, "We gauge what

the audience wants. That same audience really gives us some of the funniest lines for the show. We love it when people say things that get us out of our groove."

Tim, too, loves the interplay with the audience members. "It's very participatory. A lot of people will join in the show, and there will be a lot of improvisational things happening," he said.

"It's a show in which Harry Hyde is the local gangster/bad guy. Pretty much every character at the speakeasy is mad at him for one reason or another," Tim commented. "Harry owes a lot of people money and has stolen territory from the other gangsters in town, like the Buttafuccos and the Corneolis."

Tim continued, "The local concrete salesman, Red E. Mix, has come to the party to sell his latest invention, 'Concrete Shoes' to Harry Hyde. Cherry Boom, who started the speakeasy that she calls Trixie's, is afraid that someone might end up dead."

"But the cast won't be limited to those three characters. Oh, no! In fact, every person there will play a part. That ensures that things will get pretty crazy." Tim went on to say, "It'll be a hoot!"

For more information, contact Chelsea Gill at 526-8321.

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- www.theoutingclub.net
- Country Houses, New London
- (603-526-8321)
- The New London Agency, New London
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