



DANESE KENON staff photographer

Actors Bob Bittner, left, and Allan Johnson rehearse a scene from *The Prodigal Victim*, a play set for Friday at Palmyra's Impact Theater. Their Christian theater troupe leaves counseling pamphlets after each performance.

Acting shines light on religion

MARKETTA GREGORY

STAFF WRITER

PALMYRA — Issues like teen suicide and domestic abuse can be a little tough to take in a Sunday morning church pageant. But skits that deal with those darker issues have found a Christian home at Palmyra's Impact Theater.

Of course, humorous and light-hearted skits also are welcome, but the bread and butter of the theater troupe is showing how God can help in every situation.

"I think it opens your eyes to a lot of situations that people become complacent to," said Diane Roof, an actor from Palmyra, Wayne County. "We did a skit not too long ago that had to do with bigotry and looking down your nose at people who aren't like you. It hits home."

The theater plays host to

guest artists monthly, but twice a year the regular cast of 10 presents a full evening of skits that range from thought-provoking to knee-slapping. Friday's night of skits will be no different. Audience members can expect to ponder whether you are a person who adds to the load your fellow man carries and to also see a *Star Wars* parody.

For about five years, Frank Irace of Palmyra has been writing all the skits, directing, funding performances when necessary, tearing down sets and doing just about anything else the theater needs. In that time, audiences have grown from 40 to about 70 for the monthly performances and around 130 at the special, all-skit nights.

Irace, who grew up in New York City with a love

of theater, came to western New York to be a church youth director. He began to use drama with his youth group and the teens loved it. Then, he started noticing all the musical and acting talent within churches.

"And I thought it would be neat to do this outside the church walls," he said.

Aside from his writing skills, "Frank has a real heart for counseling," said Helen Johnson, who helps with the theater. "He tries to hit at issues that are very current in the mainstream of society."

In fact, counseling pamphlets are available at every performance. When a skit stirs up emotions about something like domestic abuse, Irace wants audience members to know where to get help.

"What really attracts me to theater is that you can

If you go

What: Impact Theater.

When: 7:30 to 9:15 p.m. Friday.

Where: 1180 Canandaigua Road, Palmyra.

Cost: Free, including coffee and desserts. A donation box is in the foyer.

communicate by story, so it holds our attention much more clearly," Johnson said. "We find something in it that helps each one of us." Johnson and three of her children travel from Scottsville to act, narrate and serve as extras in skits.

"If someone is looking for something to do to get away from the television on Friday, it's certainly different," she said. "You laugh, you think, and you may even cry from time to time." □

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