

Volunteer profile: Steve Olson, 54, producer of 'Children of Eden'

Olson volunteers with the Fox Valley Theatre Company



Jacob Groth, 14, of Elgin and the Fox Valley Theatre Company rehearse. (Photo for the Tribune by Andrew A. Nelles / August 19, 2009)

Phyllis Benson

Who: Steve Olson, 54, of Geneva is a volunteer with **Fox** Valley Theatre Company, a not-for-profit organization that works with Children's Theatre of Elgin to provide theater experiences for children and young adults.

What he does: As producer for "Children of Eden," Olson is responsible for every facet of the play, from choosing a director and choreographer to doing 80 hours of rehearsal and six performances.

Children's Theatre of Elgin is for children in 2nd through 8th grades, and Fox Valley Theatre Company is for students ages 15 to 20 who have completed 8th grade.

"This show is fairly challenging for the kids, musically," Olson said of Steven Schwartz's play. Schwartz also wrote music for plays such as "Wicked" and "Godspell."

The children chose the play, which follows the first nine chapters of the Book of Genesis, ending with the death of Eve, and then fast-forwards 1,000 years to the story of Noah building the Ark, Olson said.

The cast consists of 42 young adults, with about 75 parents building sets, painting, making costumes and doing publicity.

The theater companies receive grants from Elgin, the Illinois Arts Council, the Grand Victoria Casino Foundation. They also are in-residence ensembles at the Elgin Community College Visual and Performing Arts Center.

Participants pay a small fee, and ticket sales are used for the next production.

Why he does it: Olson, the father of three daughters, got involved about eight years ago when his oldest daughter, now 21, joined.

"Like families who have kids involved in athletics, it's a really great activity," Olson said. "The kids involved are safe and creative and have made some great friends, lifelong friends.

"The kids in the productions I've been involved in have been a lot of fun to be around, are talented, funny, articulate, thoughtful, very insightful, and bring a lot of energy to it. You can't help but draw from that."

How you can help: "Children of Eden" will be performed at 7:30 p.m. Sept. 11, 12 and 18; 2 and 7:30 p.m. Sept. 19; and 3 p.m. Sept. 13 and 20 in the Blizzard Theatre at Elgin Community College's Visual and Performing Arts Center, 1700 Spartan Drive, Elgin.

Tickets cost \$10, and \$8 for students, seniors and groups of 20 or more. For tickets, call the box office at 847-622-0300 or visit elgin.edu/arts and click on Arts Center Events. For information on the companies, visit cteelgin.com.