

Mr. Montgomery – his other passion

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photo by Michael Stearns

When Montgomery returned from the war, he went back to the family business, which eventually moved to Bremerton. Besides the machines, Montgomery's other big love has been the Bremerton Community Theatre. He has acted in or been part of the production of more than 145 shows.

"It looks like the end of an era. We're trying to figure out what he needs to retire," says past president Paul Holiday.

Montgomery tries to explain his 85 years of love for the typewriters. He says, "It's the only machine I know of that you can put a piece of paper in it, start typing, and you see something appear on that paper."

There is another side of Mr. Montgomery, and that is the theater. Bob has been an advocate of the Bremerton Community Theater since 1950. Bob Montgomery joined the Bremerton Community Theatre "almost by accident."

He was working in his typewriter shop on Sixth Street when a Buick dealer working across the street came in and asked him, "How would you like to be an actor?" It was 10 days before opening night of Bremerton Community Theatre's latest play and the group needed a replacement for an actor who quit the show. Montgomery, who had never acted before, agreed to play Senator Hedges in "Born Yesterday."

And then he auditioned for the next show at the theater.

"In a moment of foolishness I volunteered for the next play," he said. He was cast in "Two Blind Mice," which opened in 1951. So began a 50-year volunteer career of acting, directing and set designing for the Bremerton Community Theatre. He took the organization from the tiny 30-foot-by-40-foot theater on Broadway Avenue to its current location on 599 Levo Blvd., stocking the theater with its seats, rigging system and movie house organ he bought in Seattle decades ago.

Montgomery said his inexperience in theater never daunted him as he acted in his first shows. "I just went out and did whatever I could do," he said. "It didn't seem that hard."

Since his start in 1950, he has appeared in about 40 plays, in bit parts and leads, in shows such as "Comedy of Errors," "Timid Mr. Jones" and "State of the Union." He has also directed 31 shows, including "Death of a Salesman" and "Romeo and Juliet." He is also the emeritus director and historian, keeping the scrapbooks filled with photos, playbills and news clippings.

"**He is the community theater,**" said Jerry Smith, who started acting in the Bremerton Community Theater in 1961 and has appeared in shows Montgomery directed.

Theater has always co-mingled with Montgomery's typewriter and copy machine business. Before he joined the theater, many of his customers were from the Bremerton Community Theater. In 1958, Montgomery co-wrote a play performed by the community theater, "The Machine," about a typewriter that writes its own messages. Montgomery had rigged a 1926 Remington electric typewriter to type when he pushed a button off stage.

Today, his Fourth Street business is as much his community theater office as his retail and repair shop. Amid vintage typewriters, some more than 100 years old, models of stage sets he designed line shelves, including the design for the Robert B. Stewart Hall. In another room are floor-to-ceiling bookshelves packed with play scripts and a complete record of Bremerton Community Theatre's shows.

The group's history is much of Montgomery's making, those long involved in the theater say. They credit him for helping the group move from a tiny theater on Broadway Avenue – "It looked like a sharecropper's cabin in Southern Mississippi," he said – to the larger building on Lebo, a long-awaited move that finally happened in 1976 when the group was about 30 years old. Montgomery himself bought the seats and the fly system for the new theater, which came from Seattle's old Music Box Theatre and Orpheum Theatre.

"Without Bob Montgomery's expertise and work and endeavors and study, the building that's down there now probably would not exist," Smith said.

He also acquired the theater's 1921 silent movie house organ, bought in Seattle and originally from Pasco, which has pipes three stories high and is occasionally used to accompany shows. Montgomery himself has never performed the organ for a performance, and is a self-taught organist.

"I'm a midnight player when no one else is around," he said, tinkling the keys of the organ in the orchestra pit at the theater Monday.

Now, the Lebo Boulevard's auditorium is the **Robert Montgomery Auditorium**, named for him for his commitment to the community and theater.

Montgomery is revered by those in the theater as a long-standing figure in a town that doesn't see a lot of long term residents, with the Navy often pulling away community actors seemingly as soon as they come to town.

Jenny Sellar, president of the theater's Board of Directors, said Montgomery was one of the first people she met when she joined the theater 25 years ago.

"I don't know what we would do without him, I really don't," she said, noting his active role in every aspect of the theater, from his scrapbook keeping to his supervision of the new theater's construction. "He's always there, he's willing to do whatever needs to be done."