

# RiverCity

TV Listings  
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SECTION B | Friday, July 2, 2010

## STUART LITTLE



"Stuart Little," played by 9-year-old Blake Wieseler, finds himself stuck in a trash can in a scene from the Yankton Children's Theater Company's production of the classic E.B. White story. The tale of a small mouse with a human family and big dreams will be presented to the Summit Activities Center July 8-11. To see or purchase images from this event, visit [spotted.yankton.net](http://spotted.yankton.net). (Kelly Hertz/P&D)

### Yankton Children's Theater Co. Brings Beloved Classic Tale To Summit Center

BY EMILY NOHR  
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"Stuart Little" may be small in size, but the full-length musical of the same name, presented by the Yankton Children's Theater Company this month, guarantees big energy and lots of fun.

"It's a whole new crew. New people bring new ideas and creativity, and if not, they certainly learn how to do that," said Allison Spak, director of "Stuart Little" and executive director of the Yankton Children's Theater Company.

"Stuart Little" is a musical adaptation of E.B. White's classic novel. The story is about a mouse who is born into an East Coast, human family. While his small size limits him in some ways, his family encourages him to be who he is. To do so, he goes on an exciting adventure.

"They try to emphasize it's not what's on the outside, it's what's on the inside," Spak said.

The cast, made up of about 40 kids, ranges from age 4-15. Nine-year-old Blake Wieseler, in his first theatrical experience, plays the leading role of Stuart.

"Stuart is charming, he's fun and sometimes he's kind of sad," Wieseler said. "What I like about being Stuart is I have a lot of parts which I like to do. We've learned a lot of fun dances."

"He's really a dedicated little guy. He sings very well and he just amazes me," Spak added of Wieseler.

The cast started practicing in early June in the former Elks Lodge building at 407 Walnut St., the hub of the Yankton Children's Theater Company. Spak and her crew of volunteers, which consists primarily of the performers' parents, have spent weeks painting the set, sewing costumes and helping the kids learn their lines.

This musical is different from past productions, Spak said, because the children have been forced to use their imagination more than usual, as the set is just blocks that are maneuvered around to whatever shape or object they are needed for.

"If we need a window sill, we build a window sill. If we need a river, we build a river," she said.

This musical, Spak added, has the shortest preparation time in comparison to past musicals she has directed. Still, she

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## Vermillion Theater Group Brings 'Oklahoma!' To The Stage

BY PARKER KNOX  
Vermillion Plain Talk

VERMILLION — The most popular of all the Broadway musicals the legendary team of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein ever concocted, "Oklahoma!" comes to the local stage next week when Vermillion Community Theatre presents its 2010 summertime show.

"This is truly a classic work of the American musical theatre," said director Nanette Hofer. "There are timeless, memorable tunes; a script worthy of a 2006 Broadway revival, and great homespun, hearty, Midwestern characters we all know and love."

"Oklahoma!" will open Friday night, July 9, with the first of four performances at 7:30 p.m. at the Vermillion High School Performing Arts Center. Subsequent shows will be at the same curtain time Saturday and Monday sandwiched around a Sunday 2:30 p.m. matinee.

Hofer, who was interim assistant professor of musical theatre at USD in 2009-2010 and who has directed "Chicago," "Peter Pan" and "A Chorus Line" (as musical director/conductor) for the university's theatre department, had her direc-

toral baptism for VCT with "Music Man" in 2008.

"I have been very excited to see growth in the cast members," Hofer observed. "We have accomplished leading and supportive players, but a classically written musical is only as strong as its ensemble members. They have been really delightful to work with. I sense a 'growing up' of the VCT members since 'Music Man.'"

If customers at First Bank & Trust where Mecia Graham works have recently found her singing to herself at her desk or reciting lines to no one in particular, they have to understand her situation. Graham, a Custer native who has appeared in numerous musicals there and in Vermillion, plays the lead female role of Laurey.

"I think one of the best parts of musical theatre is how it takes over your being and all the little things you say and do," Graham said. "You can't help but walk around and suddenly find yourself humming one of the tunes or be carrying on a conversation with someone and suddenly say, 'Isn't that just the purtiest thing y' ev'r did see!' I catch myself also listening to others talk about things and my brain automatically thinks of a line from the play."

Graham said she loves the wide range of emotion her role entails. "I like the challenge as an actress to find her innocence, playfulness, vulnerability, love and all that comes in between," she said. "She is one of those characters who, when you see her, you can't help but be drawn into her world."

Graham's counterpart in the leading male role of Curly, Kevin Earlywine, couldn't have imagined himself in South Dakota as recently as five years ago. As a veteran fine arts performer at Auburn High School in Rockford, IL, he won the role of Marius in "Les Miserables," the Illinois High School Theatre Festival All-State musical. He auditioned for 40 colleges, and USD was one of those that called back. "They made me feel welcome and like I wasn't just a number, so I came here," he said.

Earlywine, who has two semesters left toward his musical theatre degree, said he and his character are both very driven individuals. "Curly is faced with many obstacles over the course of the play, and he faces them head-on," Earlywine said. "And I really love the music in the show. I feel honored to get to sing such wonderful music although I think my friends are sick of hearing me sing 'People Will Say We're

in Love' constantly!"

It is coincidental but ironic, too, that David Hulac, a professor of psychology at USD, is playing the brooding, misunderstood hired hand, Jud Fry.

"Playing anger is fairly simple," Hulac said, "but what is difficult is displaying the depth of his character — the isolation, desperation, loneliness, despair and brief period of joy Jud feels."

Hulac, whose favorite role was that of Jesus in "Godspell," said playing Jud Fry as a melodramatic bad guy would be an insult to the character, the authors and the audience. "This role stretches my intellect, my emotions and my body," he added, "and I am grateful for the opportunity VCT and my family have afforded me."

Hulac's 6-year-old daughter is joining him onstage, and he finds it a thrill to see the stage through her eyes and remember his own early memories of being backstage.

"I love working with this director (Hofer)," Hulac said. "She successfully accomplishes the difficult task of reconciling both her creative and very demanding

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DAVID LIAS/VERMILLION PLAIN TALK  
Laurey (Mecia Graham) and Curly (Kevin Earlywine) perform "People Will Say We're In Love" during the VCT's rehearsal of the Rodgers and Hammerstein classic "Oklahoma!" The musical will be presented July 9-12 in the Vermillion High School Performing Arts Center.

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### Entertainment Evening Entertainment

Evening entertainment show times are as follows:  
**Friday and Saturday**  
8:00 – 9:00 PM, 9:30 – 10:30 PM, 11:00 PM – 12:00 AM

Fri. & Sat. July 2-3	<b>Session 7</b> .....	VARIETY
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Fri. & Sat. July 16-17	<b>Solera Band</b> .....	VARIETY
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