

REMEMBERING GARY BUERK *by Sam Macera*



Gary in authentic Indian Costume for Waterville's Founder's Day at Conrad Park in 2002

Gary Buerk had two enduring passions during his lifetime, both of which he pursued with equal enthusiasm, high energy and joy.

When he appeared onstage in the role of Wild Horse (in authentic Indian dress) in Playshop's *Annie Get Your Gun* in 1968, it was just an extension of his life-long deep interest in Indian lore. He was very active in the Seven Tribes in Grand Rapids and was seen often in authentic dress at re-enactments and events.

While Indian lore was a deep love, it was in theatre that he had his greatest achievements.

With time out to start a business building swimming pools and a costume renting business, he came home to Playshop and created a record of involvement that will be difficult to match.

Most of Gary's activities with a show involved backstage work. His name can always be found in the program as producer (31 shows), set design (35), set construction chair (10) and naturally, costumes chair (8). Many of his activities went un-credited, by choice.

For many years he served on the Board as Production Trustee, although he also served three terms as Chair. Despite a very busy schedule, he managed to direct five shows and make a rare onstage appearance in *Lily, the Felon's Daughter* (1992). His sets were all efficiently functional and made for quick changes, especially the musical. He was also an active and dedicated member of OCTA, always encouraging Playshop to participate in the annual excerpt con-

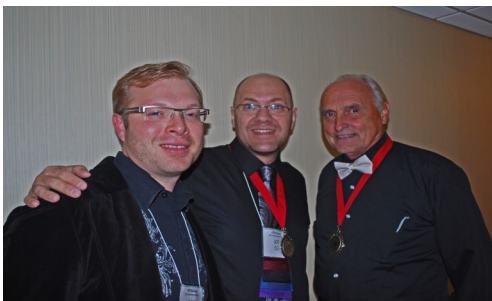
tests.

When Gary opened Kostumes, Ltd., Playshop benefited from Gary's generosity for low or no costs for costumes, especially for period shows. Playshoppers could count on Gary for a costume for a special occasion, usually at no cost.

He was a very generous, energetic, dedicated, loyal friend whose mind was always bursting with ideas. For our 60th Anniversary he created a float that won first prize at Roche de Boeuf in 2011. His floats for *Beauty and the Beast* (2007) and *The Sound of Music* (2012) were outstanding and should have won first prize. For the "Tony Awards" at Nazareth Hall he created the likes of the Oscars, with two of them guarding the entrance; annual meeting locations all benefited from his creative mind. It was said he could create a masterpiece with the wave of his hand.

As a Board member, he opened his home at Christmas time for a Board meeting and pot-luck after. Each member was given a special Christmas token. At the costume shop in Holland and later in Whitehouse, he had a copier on which we ran the Playshop Newsletter, *Calls and Cues*, collated it and prepared it for mailing. He often absorbed the cost of the ink cartridges.

As if Playshop was not enough, he, Joe Barton and Jesse Bernal created 3B Productions which presented many of the contemporary shows he and Joe wanted to do. It has been a very successful venture.



Founders of 3B Productions: Jesse Bernal, Joe Barton and Gary Buerk

He had an excellent working relationship with the manager and staff at Maumee Indoor Theatre, where we presented our plays, and the staff at Zion Lutheran Church in Waterville where we held our Board meetings, rehearsals and special programs in the church proper. At Zion, he was given full access in recognition of their trust in him.

For his dedication and involvement, Gary was awarded Playshop's highest recognition, the Spirit Award in 2001 and the Lifetime Achievement Award in 2012. In 2019 he was inducted into the Ohio Community Theatre Association's Hall of Fame a fitting tribute to his distinguished career.

Some people like Gary come along once in a lifetime. We should be glad he came in ours.

Donadagohvi, Gary.



Gary with Spirit Award in 2001