



## COVER STORY

VISITATION ACADEMY

# Setting the Stage

BY BRITTANY NAY

Students sewing costumes, building sets and even filling the director's chair are common occurrences at Visitation Academy. Its middle and upper schools' theater program, led by drama and speech teacher Marty Strohmeyer, allows young women to take the reins in four annual productions. "We believe in entrusting them as leaders—if you trust them, they are going to trust it and go with it," Strohmeyer says.

The theater program is one way the Catholic school instills its core values of scholarship, spirituality, leadership and service. "We encourage kids to develop who they are through those values," notes head of school Rosalie Henry. "Our theater program is very unique in that it instills leadership and confidence."

Each year, more than 100 students take advantage of the theater program's hands-on opportunities onstage and backstage. The production season features a musical open to middle- and upper-school girls; junior and senior student-directed one-act plays performed by younger students and judged by local professionals; a drama or comedy by upper-school girls, and a play by middle-school students. This year, performances include the '20s drama, *Radium Girls*, and the musical production, *Pinkalicious*.

Through a range of courses, including drama, acting, advanced acting and technical theater, students learn

all aspects of theater production. And they apply those skills in hands-on roles for every part of each show, Strohmeyer says, from directing to leading the set, costume, prop and makeup crews. "We give them full leadership in organizing the productions. With each crew, the kids take ownership and really run those." Girls often start as crew members, then become crew leaders as they get older and gain experience, he adds. "The girls are so eager. They want use the saw and the sewing machine."

For more than 10 years, Strohmeyer has led the school's theater program. "Families truly enroll their students at Visitation because of his talents and the impression he makes while he is directing in the St. Louis community," Henry says. Among additional roles, Strohmeyer is the co-founder and artistic director of Shooting Stars, a local children's theater company, which puts on an annual summer musical that has garnered multiple St. Louis Arts for Life awards. He also has assisted in the direction of productions for the Variety Children's Theatre and the Missouri State Thespians. In his role at Visitation, Strohmeyer also has been honored as a Teacher of Distinction by the Independent Schools of St. Louis.

Through the years at Visitation, Strohmeyer says he always strives to maintain a harmonious environment where high-quality productions can be created. And the formula seems



Abigail Isom, Emma Baylis and Olivia Prosser perform in Visitation Academy's recent production of *Little Women*.

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to be working: Visitation students have gone on to bigger stages, from starring in local productions at The Muny to becoming professionals onstage and backstage in New York and California. Onstage or backstage, Strohmeyer says "it's always about being a family and putting on a good production."



**ON OUR COVER:** Visitation Academy, located at 3020 North Ballas Road, is an independent, Catholic school offering a coeducational Montessori program for toddlers through kindergartners and an all-girls environment for first-through 12th-graders. Cover photo by Paradigm New Media Group. For more information, call 625-9100 or visit [visitationacademy.org](http://visitationacademy.org).