

Charming clan encourages hotel full of characters

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BY MICHELE LEMMON

The Columbus Dispatch

William Goldsmith fondly remembers growing up on a dairy farm in Sunbury, where the land was covered with corn instead of houses.

When he read the script for *The Elevator Family*, the artistic director of Columbus Children's Theatre recalled images of his youth.

"It reminded me of a time and place when one assumed the best in people, and that was my childhood," Goldsmith said. "There are so many bad things that happen in the world that we tend to focus on the negatives and not the positives. I really believe the vast majority of people are good."

What he likes about the quirky play is that the principal characters, those of the Wilson family, share such an uplifting point of view.

The story finds the Wilsons arriving at a hotel in San Francisco to find that every room is already booked, said Goldsmith, director of the production.

So they move into the one "room" that seems vacant: the hotel elevator.

"One of them says, 'I'm glad we took this room because, every time it stops, someone tries to take it,'" Goldsmith said.

From the room they dub "Otis," they interact with hotel guests and employees - such as Mrs. Goldengate (Andy Jones), who lives on the top floor; and traveling salesman Mr. Brown (Luther W. Center Jr.).

"They end up changing their lives."

The play marks the third Columbus Children's Theatre show for Center, an engineer from Circleville.

He previously appeared in *Seussical the Musical* and *The Boxcar Children*.

Center portrays a friendly salesman who doesn't get to know many people on the road.

"He gets lonely and sad," the actor said, "and this charming family befriends him, and they turn his whole life around."



WILLIAM GOLDSMITH

The bellhop (Blair Brightwell), left, with the Wilson family (from left: Daniel Szolosi, Emma Andrews, Karla Andrews and Chip Barr) in *The Elevator Family*

The Elevator Family

COLUMBUS CHILDREN'S THEATRE, 512 N. PARK ST. (614-224-6672, WWW.COLSCHILDRENSTHEATRE.ORG)

TIMES 7:30 p.m. today, Friday and Feb. 10-11 and 17-18; 1, 3 and 5 p.m. Saturday and Feb. 12 and 19; and 1 and 3 p.m. Sunday and Feb. 13 and 20

ADMISSION \$13 to \$18, or \$10 to \$15 for children, students and senior citizens - or \$9 for the Thursday shows

Center credits Goldsmith for the adaptation.

"He always has excellent ideas beyond what's written in the script.

Bill has added a lot of stuff that happens between the scenes."

Chip Barr - whom Center called "exceptional" in the role of the father, Walter - is performing for the first time in a Columbus Children's Theatre production.

Barr, an Ohio native who studied theater at Muskingum University in New Concord, recently re-embraced the Columbus area after a stint as a stonemason in Canada.

When he made plans in the fall for his move back to Ohio, he researched the acting scene.

"This was the first one I saw, and I thought that it might be a good way for me to get my feet wet," Barr said. "I liked the simplicity and eccentricity of the family, and I really relate to it."

A newcomer to children's theater, he was intrigued by the idea of working with youngsters and adults.

"The kids are amazing," he said. "They do an excellent job. And Bill, he's an expert at guiding and teaching." *Michele Lemmon is a Columbus freelance writer.*

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