

Monday, January 14, 2008

OU to screen 'Shakespeare Behind Bars'

On Thursday, Jan. 31, Oakland University will screen the award-winning documentary "Shakespeare Behind Bars," to be followed by a question and answer session with Curt Tofteland, volunteer director of the innovative Shakespeare Behind Bars theatre company, the only North American Shakespeare company contained within the walls of a medium security adult male prison and subject of the documentary. The film will be shown in Varner Recital Hall at 8 p.m.

In 1995, Tofteland, in collaboration with psychologist Dr. Julie Barto, founded Shakespeare Behind Bars at the Luther Lockett Correctional Complex in LaGrange, Kentucky. The program embraces restorative justice, allowing the adult prison population to examine relevant personal and social issues within the structure of an aesthetic experience.

This drama-in-education approach offers participants the opportunity for "safe" encounters with complex issues, encouraging the development of the interpersonal life skills that will contribute to the inmates' successful reintegration into society; of the 2.4 million inmates incarcerated within the prisons of the United States, 90 percent will at some point in their lives return to society.

The film documentary, written and directed by Hank Rogerson and produced by Jilann Spitzmiller, goes behind the walls of the Kentucky prison to chronicle Tofteland's company in rehearsal for a production of "The Tempest." The film also depicts the actors in their cells, where they become the prime subjects of searching interviews mirroring confessional soliloquies. In front of the camera, heinous crimes are graphically narrated, owned and repented.

As one of the actors submits, "The death scene in 'Othello' (when Othello kills Desdemona) was similar to the crime I committed. I couldn't think of my victim as a person then. I do now."

Tofteland, who also serves as producing artistic director of the Kentucky Shakespeare Festival, was recently named a 2007 Petra Foundation Fellow.

The event is sponsored by the **Honors College** and the **Department of English**. It is free and open to the public. For more information about the event, call (248) 370-4450. For more information about the film, visit the **Shakespeare Behind Bars** Web site.



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SUMMARY

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