

# 'On Golden Pond' captures family strife, love



Pam Taylor and Dave Anderson star in "On Golden Pond" at the Boathouse Theatre. Photos/Kathryn Reed

**By Kim Wyatt**

CAMP RICHARDSON – The Boathouse Theatre is one sweet place to see live theater. It's charming and intimate, like the production of "On Golden Pond" that debuted July 2 at the Tallac Historic Site. Playing to an appreciative and almost full house, this iconic play drove home all that is wonderful (and awful) about family.

The 2015 Valhalla Art, Music & Theatre Festival kicked off its 35th season with the play penned by Ernest Thompson in 1979 that won a Tony and then three Oscars for the film adaptation featuring Henry Fonda and Katherine Hepburn.

Ethel and Norman Thayer have spent 43 summers together at a

home on Golden Pond. In a testament to her youthful appearance or good genes, Pam Taylor's ebullient Ethel hardly looks 69 years old as she swats back bugs that threaten their idyll. Norman, skillfully played by Dave Anderson, is a good decade older than his wife, and he acts like it. Even so, his curmudgeonly outlook made for the best and longest laughs of the night.



Pam Taylor and Stephanie Grigsby are adept at capturing mother-daughter angst.

When their daughter Chelsea visits with her fiancé Billy Ray and his son Billy Ray Jr., the father-daughter relationship rankles – Chelsea is hanging on to some major childhood baggage, and is still seeking approval from her distant father.

The men in the play shine in the first act, likely because they have the best lines. The women get their chance in the second act, revealing their characters' interior lives. The familiar tenor of the fight between Ethel and her daughter made me squirm. And when Chelsea, played by Stephanie Grigsby, opens up to her withholding father, I winced at his continued rejection. They are each wanting to connect, but their inability to be vulnerable makes it impossible. A vulnerability, that when it comes full circle at the end,

gives us hope for the family, and maybe all families.

The appearance of Billy Jr. added a bright note to this production. Thomas Rayo did a crackerjack job as a 13-year-old boy who adds spice – and purpose – to an old man’s life, which leads to the healing of his fractured family. Ryan Adams and Jody Paslov rounded out the cast nicely as Chelsea’s current and former suitors.

Co-produced by the Dakota Organization, a theatrical organization based in Minden, the tender drama was directed by Ethan Niven, who is also on staff as the festival assistant.

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**Notes:**

- “On Golden Pond” will run: July 3 and 5, July 9-12 and July 16-18.
- Find ticket information online.

*Kim Wyatt is the owner of the independent press Bona Fide Books and the co-founder of Tahoe WordWave, to debut Oct. 9 at the Tallac Historic Site.*