

Educational Arts Advocate Award – Individual *Jim Cermak*



Photo by Karen Frost

Jim Cermak shows Gooseberry Park Players board members the preliminary sketches of the set design for this summer's production of *The Wiz*.

It is fair to say Jim Cermak's life has revolved around theater. He began down that path as a high school student and has never looked back. He received a bachelor's degree in speech and theater education from Southwest Missouri State University and a master's degree in design and technical theater from the University of Missouri, and he completed his doctoral studies in arts management, youth theater, directing and organizational communication at Southern Illinois University.

Over the years, he has performed in, stage managed, directed, and co-founded several touring groups, professional repertory companies and summer theater programs. He has served as the president of the Minnesota Theatre Foundation and on the board of directors of the Red River Dance and Performing Company and the Fargo-Moorhead Opera.

Cermak arrived at Concordia College in 1972 and is currently an assistant professor in the Communication Studies and Theatre Art Department and director of theater. He is also the managing artistic director of the Gooseberry Park Players, a summer theater for youth. "In his years at Concordia College and Gooseberry Park Players, Jim continues to pick and put on theater productions that entertain and educate," said Frank Pierce, president on the Gooseberry Park Players board of directors. "That has always been one of his main concerns in the theater arts, everyone that sees a show or is in the show should learn from it."

According to his Gooseberry Park Players biography, Cermak believes he found his calling through mentors and opportunities that were placed in his path since his earliest years. He is an outspoken advocate for the belief that theater provides a series of experiential "life skills" that cannot be replicated anywhere else in an academic education. "Working with Gooseberry Park Players has given me a chance to return to these kids some of the opportunities that I've been given," he said. "Not many kids in today's society will have a life in theater, but everyone can have theater in their life." -Lake Agassiz Arts Council New Letter-Summer 2008-