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Re: **Theater Arts**

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Psycho-Active performance plays to a full, enthusiastic house

Invisible Village Theatre at Southside's Rex Theater



New production offered
humor and insight
to stigma of mental
illness

Part of new strategies
for recovery and
integration into society

(PITTSBURGH) September 24, 2008 — On September 9th the eclectic Invisible Village Theatre company performed its latest provocative production, *Psycho-Active*, at the Rex Theater on the Southside. More than 150 theater goers packed the venue and responded enthusiastically to the unusual production.

What makes Invisible Village Theatre unique is that many of the actors in *Psycho-Active* are in various stages of recovery from mental illness. The other performers are support staff with Mercy Behavioral Health, which funds the theater company as part of its varied rehabilitation services.

In the vein of *Saturday Night Live*, this *Psycho-Active* production featured a series of reality-based skits, all themed around mental illness and shaped by personal stories and improvisation. Three pieces made up the majority of the show:

- “Haywired” — a serious piece about paranoia and the throes of psychosis
- “Upton-Downy Report” — a comedic skit about two newscasters, one manic, one depressive!
- “Gotcha” — a serious piece about coping in the workplace and people making fun of mental illness

Also, there were shorter, mostly comedic skits, including “Drive Thru Therapy,” the most humorous and enthusiastically received skit.

Founded in 1992, the IVT company has performed in several prominent Pittsburgh venues in the past, including Club Cafe, Pittsburgh Public Theater, City Theater and Rosebud.

As with all previous IVT productions, this play and the company “aim to dispel the stigmas about mental illness,” according to director Jim Walsh. Retired from supervising psychiatric rehabilitation at Mercy Behavioral Health, he coaches and directs the actors, often mentoring them too—about jobs, crises and life. According to a New York therapy expert, “the healing is in making the unconscious conscious,” which IVT has been striving for since its formation.

With the impending closing of Mayview State Hospital—continuing a trend that began in the 1980s—more of this type of creative, effective outpatient programs will likely be funded. Today there is a new emphasis on alternate ways of speeding recovery and integration into society for people with chronic and persistent mental illness. According to director Walsh several actors have gotten full time jobs and have stopped receiving disability benefits after involvement with the theater.