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Johnson returns to theater at The PAC

BECCA OWSLEY The News-Enterprise

Jun 23, 2021



Paige Johnson is bringing her desire for a career in theater back home to The Hardin County Schools Performing Arts Center. Submitted photo

Getting to know Paige Johnson

Favorite theater productions: "Fiddler on the Roof" and "Topdog Underdog"

Favorite movies: "Forrest Gump," "Royal Tenenbaums," "Parasite," "Rear Window" and "10 Things I Hate about You"

Favorite book: "Persuasion" by Jane Austen

Favorite food: Sushi, specifically Dynamite roll with eel and a Rainbow roll

Hobbies: Knitting, cross stitch and crochet as well as listening to audio books and pod casts, reading, watching movies and board games, party games and trivia games

Relationship: She's been with Justin Hawkins for nine years

John Hardin High School graduate Paige Johnson is returning home to continue her theater dreams.

Johnson, 30, will be stepping into the role of box office manager at Hardin County Schools Performing Arts Center and the role extends to working on productions at the facility.

After high school, Johnson received a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Theatre Design and Technology at Western Kentucky University.

Growing up, Johnson said she always had a soft spot for music and was in the band in middle school and choir in high school.

"One of my friends in choir asked me if I wanted to help paint a set for the upcoming production at the PAC," she said. "While painting, the technical director, Aaron Taylor asked me if I wanted to run a spotlight for the show since I ran one for a choir show the year before."

After that taste of the tech crew, Johnson was hooked.

“They couldn’t get rid of me and I ended up being a PAC aid my senior year which meant I helped out during one of my class periods, like a co-op where you work at a job for your class credit,” she said.

When Johnson was a child, she wanted to sing and dance and would pretend she was on stage.

That dream changed to working back stage.

“Nothing can compare to the feeling of getting the lighting cue to hit perfectly right at the same time as the final note of a song or to hear the audience make an ah noise when the disco ball kicks in with the chorus,” Johnson said. “I found that you can make such an amazing impact on someone with lighting, sounds, sets and costumes just as much as playing a role on stage.”

During her career, Johnson said she’s had many kinds of jobs in theater.

Johnson became friends with several people she’s worked with while helping paint sets, carpentry, stage management, lighting and sound. Johnson said she even worked on costumes and joked that wasn’t her finest work.

She’s freelanced for companies in Louisville and Bowling Green, interned at the Adirondack theatre festival in Glens Falls, New York, and had an apprenticeship in electrics at Huntington Theatre Co. in Boston.

While working in human resources for a home health care company, she kept freelancing in Louisville and volunteering at the PAC and Hardin County Playhouse.

Taylor said it’s been an honor to know Johnson since she was a sophomore in high school.

“From there she became my go-to volunteer for years,” Taylor said. “She has a gift for tech theater and it carried her all the way to a BFA.”

Taylor said Johnson’s public relations skills have grown through her work.

“I couldn’t be happier to have her coming to work full-time and full-circle back here at the PAC,” he said. “I am so proud of this kid and all she has accomplished.”

Johnson said it’s amazing to be able to come back to Elizabethtown to officially work at the PAC.

Her main role at the center will be running the box office, maintaining financial records and promotions.

"This job also comes with many other hats and everyone at the PAC is well-versed with each other's roles," she said. "So I could step in for someone else, if need be I could be running cameras, lights or sound and pretty much helping out with any needs at the PAC."

PAC Director Bart Lovins joked it will be nice to have Johnson around to have someone there shorter than he is.

"Not only is Paige one of our most experienced past students when it comes to technical theater, but she also brings a wealth of public relations skills from her work outside of professional theater," Lovins said.

Johnson said it's difficult to narrow down what her favorite project has been in theater because she's enjoyed all of them.

"Nutcracker" at the PAC always has been a favorite because she's worked on it for more than 10 years.

"It's my favorite holiday tradition," she said. "It's not Christmas without the 'Nutcracker.'"

Another favorite is a stage show called "Ripcord" at the Huntington Theatre Co., the last show she worked on in Boston.

"I got to program notes with a notoriously demanding lighting designer and held my own," she said. "He was an amazing artist and was very particular about what he wanted."

Before the show opened she got a thank you from him which was not the norm, she said.

"It was a very challenging and rewarding show to work on," she said. "Plus the actresses in the show were phenomenal."

Claire Allen, with Hardin County Playhouse has worked with Johnson there and the PAC.

"Paige is always fantastic to work with on a show – she's ever the professional and knows her stuff when it come to the tech side of theater," Allen said. "I always enjoy seeing her lighting designs during a production and love working with her in the tech booth."

She said Johnson knows how to make any production look professional.

With her passion for theater she doesn't have a lot of free time but when she does she enjoys crafting and watching movies. Even the pod casts she listens to are about movies, so even when she's not

watching them, she's listening about them.

"I like how you can lose yourself in a good movie, book or TV show," she said.

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