

## Bill Johnson joins cast

A Methodist minister and a play about a free-spirited, ex-television writer are not as strange a combination as one might think, according to Russ Hendrickson, director of the upcoming Gilroy Community Theatre's production of "A Thousand Clowns."

When the minister is the Rev. Bill Johnson of Gilroy and the play is "A Thousand Clowns," the combination is almost inevitable, Hendrickson said.

Like everyone else in the six-member cast, Johnson said he was drawn to the play out of fondness for the Herb Gardner comedy. The minister said he has never heard one play quoted so much in sermons.

"I've used several lines from the play myself," he admitted.

The presentation is slated to begin at 8 p.m. on June 20, 21, 27 and 28 at the Gavilan Theatre.

Johnson, who has headed the local congregation for five years, sees nothing unusual about his taking part in the play; he was a radio-television major at San Francisco State College before switching to philosophy and theology, and going on to a seminary.

"I've always appreciated and enjoyed what drama can do, even though I haven't had the chance to get involved since I was in high school. In fact, I sometimes like to use a

short play instead of a sermon in my services.

"Plays just seem to speak for themselves. It may be that persons tend to identify more with a character in a play than with an abstract idea," the minister said, adding that Al Bloom of Gilroy had presented several one-act plays to his congregation.

Johnson feels that "A Thousand Clowns" is widely used, even by some of the outstanding preachers in the county, because it contains so many messages about the way people live.

"I think one of the most important ideas in the play is that of being a good laugh, of being able to see ourselves and laugh at the things we do," he commented.

The part which Johnson play is one that would seem to fit a minister as he is cast in the role of Albert Amundson, an uptight, humorless social worker, Hendrickson said, noting that Johnson is the furthest from being type cast, as far as personality is concerned, of anyone in the show.

Commenting on his own role, Johnson said it would appear to be philosophically closer to Murray Burns, the principal character whom he so frequently hears quoted in sermons.

"I try to do a lot with humor. There's just too much sadness in the world as it is," he remarked.

In keeping with his belief in the importance of laughter,

Johnson was enthusiastic when asked about Bubbles, a doll whose anatomy lights up in a rather spectacular and distracting fashion.



BILL JOHNSON

"That part is going to be great," he promised. "There is some tremendous dialogue about Bubbles."

Johnson went on to say that he agreed with the author's points about people who take things too seriously, which the presence of Bubbles brings home so well.

Johnson did have one typically unministerial complaint about his part in the play quipping, "I don't get to kiss the girl."

Others in the production are Dr. James Neilson, Murray Burns; Frank Ginelli, Arnold Burns; Lee Krahenbuhl, Nick; Geri Armenta, Sandra Markowitz; and Bill Spendlove, Leo Herman.

## Auditions scheduled

Auditions for the Gilroy Community Theatre production of "A Thousand Clowns" will be held Friday, April 11, and Sunday, April 13 at 7:30 p.m. in the Gilroy High School Music Building.

The cast of Herb Gardner's whimsical comedy about an unemployed television writer and his battles with the 'straight' world of jobs, neckties, briefcases, and government bureaus and red tape, includes four men, one young woman, and one boy in his early teens. The ages of the men range from the late twenties to the middle forties.

### Gilroy Community Theatre

Presents

## "A THOUSAND CLOWNS"

written by Herb Gardner-directed by Russ Hendrickson  
All Local Cast

Jim Neilson  
Gerri Armenta  
Bill Spendlove

Lee Krahenbuhl  
Bill Johnson  
Frank Ginelli

June 20, 21, 27, 28

Gavilan College Theatre 8:00 pm  
General \$3.00 Students \$1.50



# Local Play Features Gilroy High Talent

GHS freshman Lee Krahenbuhl has been cast in a featured role in Gilroy Community Theatre's production of "A Thousand Clowns."

Lee, who has previously appeared in "Oliver", "Anything Goes", and "The Garden", will play the part of Nick Burns, a precocious 12 year-old who lives with his eccentric uncle. Together the two plot to find a way to keep the Bureau of Child Welfare from sending Nick to a more wholesome environment.

GHS drama teacher Russell Hendrickson will direct the play.

Another familiar face in the cast will be that of the Rev. William Johnson, who has spent considerable time substituting at GHS. Rev. Johnson plays the part of the social worker who tries to separate Nick and his uncle.

Others in the play are Dr. James Neilson, Gerri Armenta, Bill Spendlove, and Frank Gianelli, principal of El Roble School.

"A Thousand Clowns" will be presented June 20, 21, 27, and 28 at 8:00 p.m. in the Gavilan College theater.



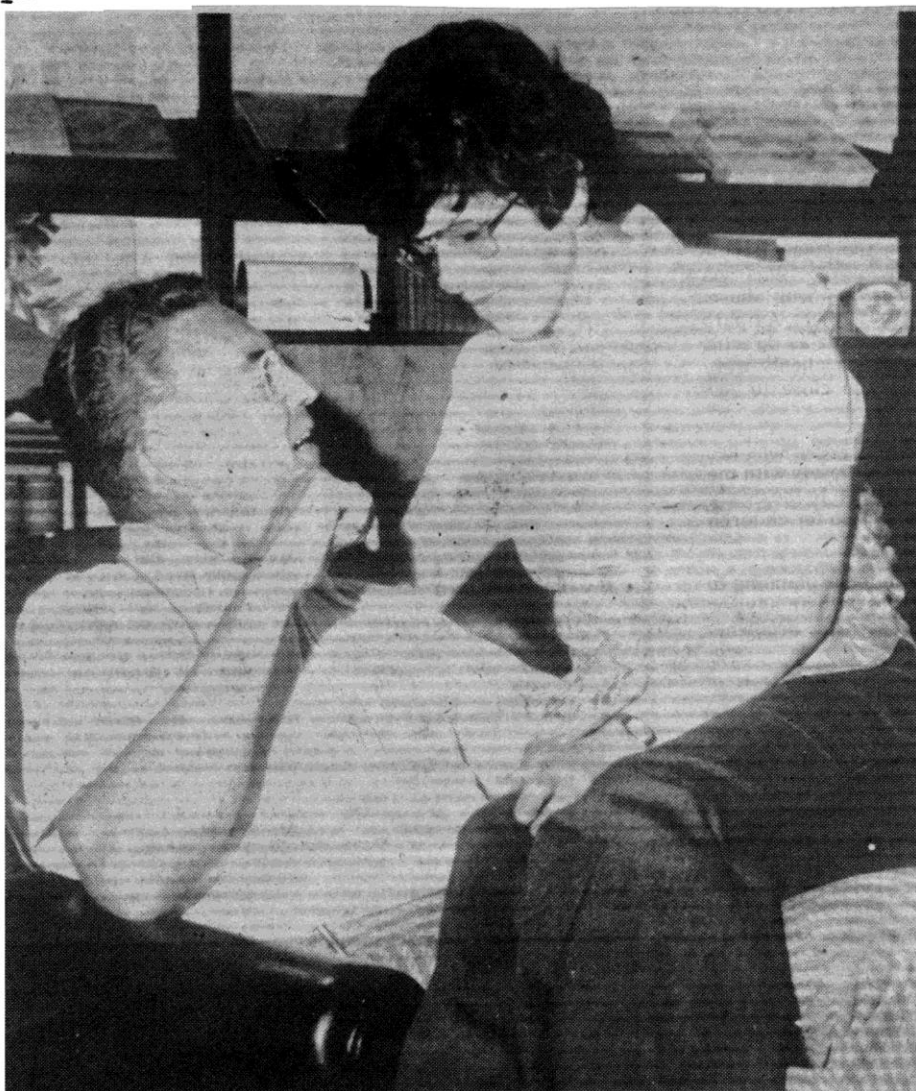
**COMEDY ROLES** - Members of the cast of "A Thousand Clowns," opening Friday include Lee Krahenbuhl left, and Bill Spendlove. They join Jim Neilson, Bill Johnson, Gerri Armenta and Frank Ginelli in Gilroy Community Theatre's production directed by Russ Hendrickson. Performances of the comedy will be staged June 20, 21, 27 and 28 at the Gavilan College Theatre. Curtain time for all shows is 8 p.m. Following the opening night performance, members of the Theatre Angels Art League will sponsor a reception in the college library lounge.

## Neilson heads new cast

Dr. James Neilson will head the cast of the Gilroy Community Theatre production "A Thousand Clowns." This is the first stage appearance for Neilson, a long-time admirer of Jason Robards, who starred in the original Broadway production. He will play the part of Murray Burns, an eccentric unemployed television writer.

Neilson will be joined by a cast of local actors. Gilroy High School freshman Lee Krahenbuhl will play the part of Nicky, Murray's nephew and Rev. Bill Johnson will appear as social worker Albert Amundson. Gerri Armenta, Gilroy Unified School District secretary, will play Sandra Markowitz, Albert's fiancée; El Roble School principal Frank Ginelli will play Arnold Burns, his brother, and Bill Spendlove will play Chuckles the Chipmunk.

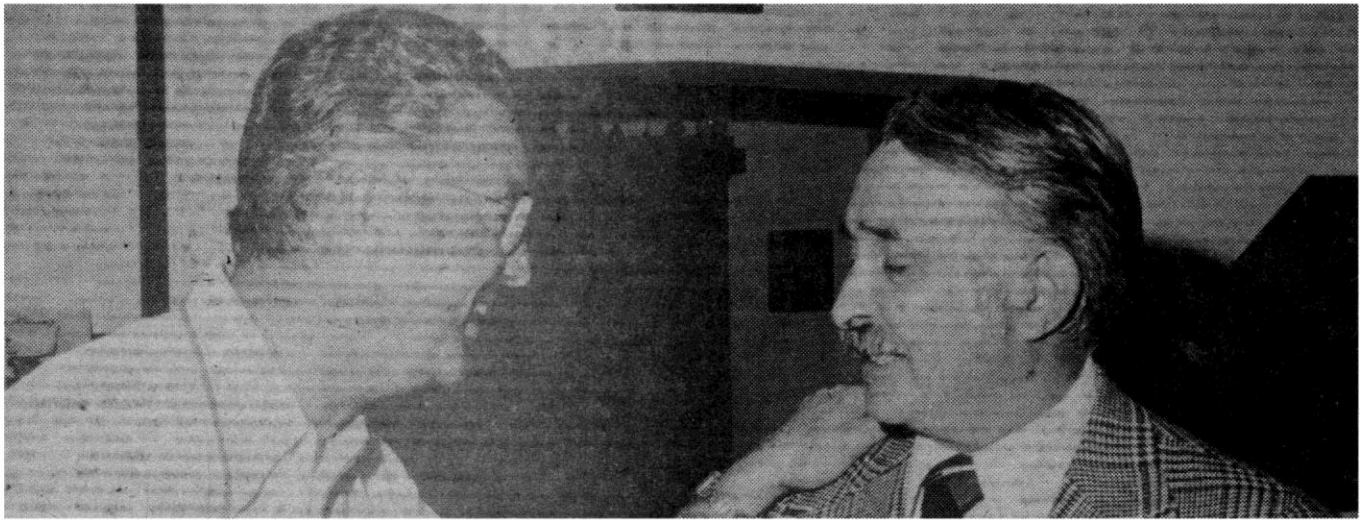
Gilroy High School drama instructor Russell Hendrickson will direct the production which will be presented June 20, 21, 27 and 28 at 8 p.m. in the Gavilan College Theatre.



**OPENING FRIDAY** - Dr. James Neilson plays both the part of Murray Burns and armchair for Gerri Armenta during the Gilroy Community Theatre's production of "A Thousand Clowns" on June 20, 21, 27 and 28 at Gavilan Theatre. Photo by John White Jr.



# 'A Thousand Clowns'



JIM NEILSON AND FRANK GINELLI

## Jim Neilson leads lively cast

By ELLEN FUCHS

I saw Jim Neilson in his undershorts the other night at the Gavilan College Theatre. He was charming, philosophic and utterly irresponsible as Murry Burns of "A Thousand Clowns," the latest offering of Gilroy Community Theatre.

"He's a middle-aged kid," so said Murry about his nephew Nick, played by our favorite musician-cartoonist-singer-actor Lee Krahenbuhl (Lee is the name for a tall person Lee.) He interacts with other players so well and performs like a trouper. Easy and delightful to watch.

Frank Ginelli is a person with a very important and responsible job in Gilroy. He's a school principal. I know Frank Ginelli and he is definitely not a nebish (English translation: a nothing.) But as Arnie Burns he does a perfect nebish's nebish and makes his Arnie so sympathetic.

The nightmare of a psychiatric-social worker is getting "involved" and involved gets Gerri Armenta as Sandy, one half of a social work team on Murry's case. Oh the years of hard work to finally get her doctorate only

to get "involved" with Murry, that irresponsible nogoodnick! Poor Sandy. Lucky us.

The other half of that social work team is Albert, well acted by Methodist minister Bill Johnson. Not only does Bill sound like an uptight, prudish boor, he looks like one! Those who know the quick wit and gentleness of this special member of our community will appreciate the fine job of portraying a person so unlike himself (although he did have help from his \$4.98 suit.)

Now to Bill Spendlove. Out of a show with memorable

lines, humorous interchanges and lighthearted acting comes Chuckles and Chipmonk. Sounds as though he's be funny, yes? NO. Bill Spendlove took this character and breathed life into it. This tragic funnyman, this pitiful hyper, neurotic person. Chuckles the Chipmonk lives. A moving and marvelous job of insight and thoughtful acting. Yes, I remember Pinky Lee, with tears.

Happy Birthday Irving R. Feldman.

See "A Thousand Clowns" tonight, Saturday or next weekend. Curtain time is 8 p.m.

## 'A Thousand Clowns'

# GCT's new play scheduled to open

"Murray, why does everybody have to come up and audition for HUMAN BEING in front of you?"

Murray Burns

## A Thousand Clowns

June 20, 21, 27, 28

**Gilroy  
Community  
Theatre**

"A Thousand Clowns," the story of a man who doesn't believe in rules, opens this coming weekend at the Gavilan Theatre Saturday and Sunday night at 8 p.m.

Presented by the Gilroy Community Theatre, the play, according to its star, Dr. James Neilson, is supposed to make people laugh at themselves.

"I think that's the point of the play; to bring out typical roles that people play and to get us to laugh at ourselves," Neilson said.

Neilson plays a character by

the name of Murray Burns who has done what most people dream of doing, getting out of the rat race. "Some people would head for the South Seas or the mountains. All Murray wants is unemployment and kosher delicatessen," Neilson said.

Neilson commented that he thought there was a little of Murray in everybody, adding that it was fortunate there are very few actual Murrays around.

"If there were, the world would probably go to pieces. We do need a few people like Murray. It's just that we can't

cope with a lot of them", he said.

Director Russ Hendrickson commented that the other characters in the play could be viewed in relation to Murray. "They reflect varying degrees of conformism and iconoclasm (disregard for cherished beliefs).

Neilson, who has not performed in a play since high school, had to relearn a lot of his acting techniques, for instance relating movement sequences with his lines.

"A Thousand Clowns" will be also presented on June 27 and 28 at 8 p.m. in the Gavilan Theatre.

# 'Thousand Clowns' playing at Gavilan

By Jim Hatlo

The Gilroy Community Theatre's production of the Herb Gardner comedy "A Thousand Clowns," which concludes its run this weekend at Gavilan College, fulfills a prediction made in this space some months ago:

GCT's heroic February production of "The Lion In Winter" is a very, very tough act to follow.

Not that "A Thousand Clowns" falls short of being entertaining, or that its cast and director fail to do capable jobs. But the marriage of an exceptional play with inspired performances, consummated so beautifully in "The Lion In Winter," is rather a shotgun affair here.

Much of the blame can be ~~laid to the playwright though~~ there were a few shortcomings in the staging. Gardner's script is full of warmth and sympathetic characters but the progression of the plot is occasionally stilted and awkward. The second act is particularly jerky, and the concluding action of the third act is completely unbalanced by the appearance, for the first time, of a wildly eccentric secondary character.

It should be emphasized that the structural flaws did not prevent individual members of the cast from giving outstanding performances.

James Neilson renders a fine characterization of Murray Burns, the irrepressible out-of-work television writer at the center of the plot, and gets a great supporting performance from young Lee Krahenbuhl as Burns' worldly 12-year-old nephew, Nick. Gerri Armenta is enjoyable as Sandra Markowitz, the sentimental social worker who loses her heart to Burns, though her characterization lacks a certain amount of spunk.

Frank Ginelli is adequately wishy-washy, maybe too much so, as Burns' doormat literary-agent brother Arnold and Bill Johnson is superb as Albert Amundson, Sandra Markowitz' Prissy co-worker. Special plaudits go to Bill Spendlove as Zany Leo Herman, alter-ego of "Chuckles the Chipmunk," who nearly steals the whole show with his explosive appearance in the third act.

Director Russell Hendrickson's set is well done but a minor flaw in its design detracts from one of the show's central running gags, a plot device which unfortunately closes the play. ~~Burns is given to yelling~~ imperious commands out his

apartment window to the neighborhood and the world in general, on the order of "All right neighbors; your garbage has no class! Let's see some champagne bottles and caviar tins in there!" On the set the apartment window is in the middle of the rear flat, which requires Burns to turn his back on the audience whenever he delivers such lines. Besides muffling them somewhat, this faceless delivery robs the lines of much of their dramatic impact.

The third act ends with Burns seated at the window, hurling his taunts into the alley, while Nick and Sandra go about cleaning up the apartment. This tableaux of two supporting characters ignoring the central character, who in turn is facing away from everybody else in the theater, is somehow an unsatisfying way to conclude a play.

Whatever the technical shortcomings, the cast and crew stage the production with commendable enthusiasm. The play was well-received by its Friday and Saturday night audiences last weekend.

Tickets cost \$3, \$1.50 for students. Performances tonight and Saturday night begin at 8 in the Gavilan College Theater.