

Comedy of rumors

By **MIKE HALE**

Staff writer

Charlie is upstairs with a bullet in his head. His wife is missing and guests who arrive at the couple's 10th anniversary party try to cover up the tragedy with layers of well-intentioned lies.

That premise belongs to Neil Simon's hilarious and farcical comedy "Rumors," served up with dinner and dessert at South Valley Civic Theatre's annual fall dinner show beginning Saturday at the Playhouse in Morgan Hill.

To pull off this comedy gem — penned by the one of the most famous playwrights ever — the SVCT team has worked overtime on delivery, timing

and heavy doses of hyperbole and exaggeration.

On a dusty stage and against the backdrop of a yet unfinished set, director Marion Pintello shouts orders to 10 local actors — all struggling to squeeze the role of part-time actor into their busy lives.

But there is no loss of professionalism at this frenetic run-through, which blends perfectly with the pace of "Rumors," Simon's former Broadway show.

Watching pensively from one of the dinner tables is producer Rod Pintello, who also happens to be the director's husband. He's seen dozens of these rehearsals, but still the lines make him laugh.

"Marion and I are Neil Simon buffs from way back," said Rod, normally seen on stage but recruited by the SVCT board to produce this show. "Marion and I both wanted to act in this because we've seen the show and just died laughing."

Death and laughter are two basic ingredients of "Rumors" and the Pintellos have spent many hours talking about how to blend both into a fun-filled few hours. They spend their lunch hours at the Playhouse and have meetings in the car on the ride home to Gilroy from rehearsal and at home.

"It's great," Rod said, "because when I have a question I don't have to call the director, I just roll over."

Marion Pintello, who has previously directed "Crimes of the Heart," "The Fantastics," and "Once Upon a Mattress" for SVCT, said the two make a good team. "We trust each other. I try hard not to do his job and he tries hard not to do mine."

The Pintellos even enlisted the help of their daughter Whitney, a creative arts and drama major at San Jose State. She designed the set, even going so far as creating a paper model to help the cast with its blocking while the set is under construction.

Since this is community theater, all the actors swing hammers and run paint brushes over the soon-to-be Victorian home in New York City.

The cast is a unique blend of veterans like Bill Corneth, making his 21st appearance on stage, and Lynn Morrison, a neophyte who makes her stage debut.

"The new faces are great and made for an interesting casting process," Marion said. "We saw exactly who fit perfectly together as couples. All the new actors come to set construction, they bring their kids. They've really been joiners. They experienced community theater right away."

Rumors

What: South Valley Civic Theatre presents its annual fall dinner show, "Rumors," a comedy by Neil Simon.
Where: South Valley Playhouse, 235 Tennant Station, Morgan Hill
Producer: Rod Pintello
Director: Marion Pintello
Dates: Nov. 18, 19, 25, 26, Dec. 2, 3, 9, 10, 16, 17 and gala New Year's Eve performance Dec. 31
Times: Dinner at 7 p.m., curtain rises at 8 p.m.
Tickets: \$25
Reservations: call 842-SHOW

It took some prodding to get Morrison to take the leap into theater, but the purchasing manager for the Morgan Hill School District has no regrets.

"It's a kick," said Morrison, who joins fellow "Rumors" cast members Juliene Fuller, Lisa Lewis and John Romano as SVCT newcomers. "There are times when I miff my lines and I think, 'Why did I do this?' But everyone has been really supportive."

Additional cast members include: Dick

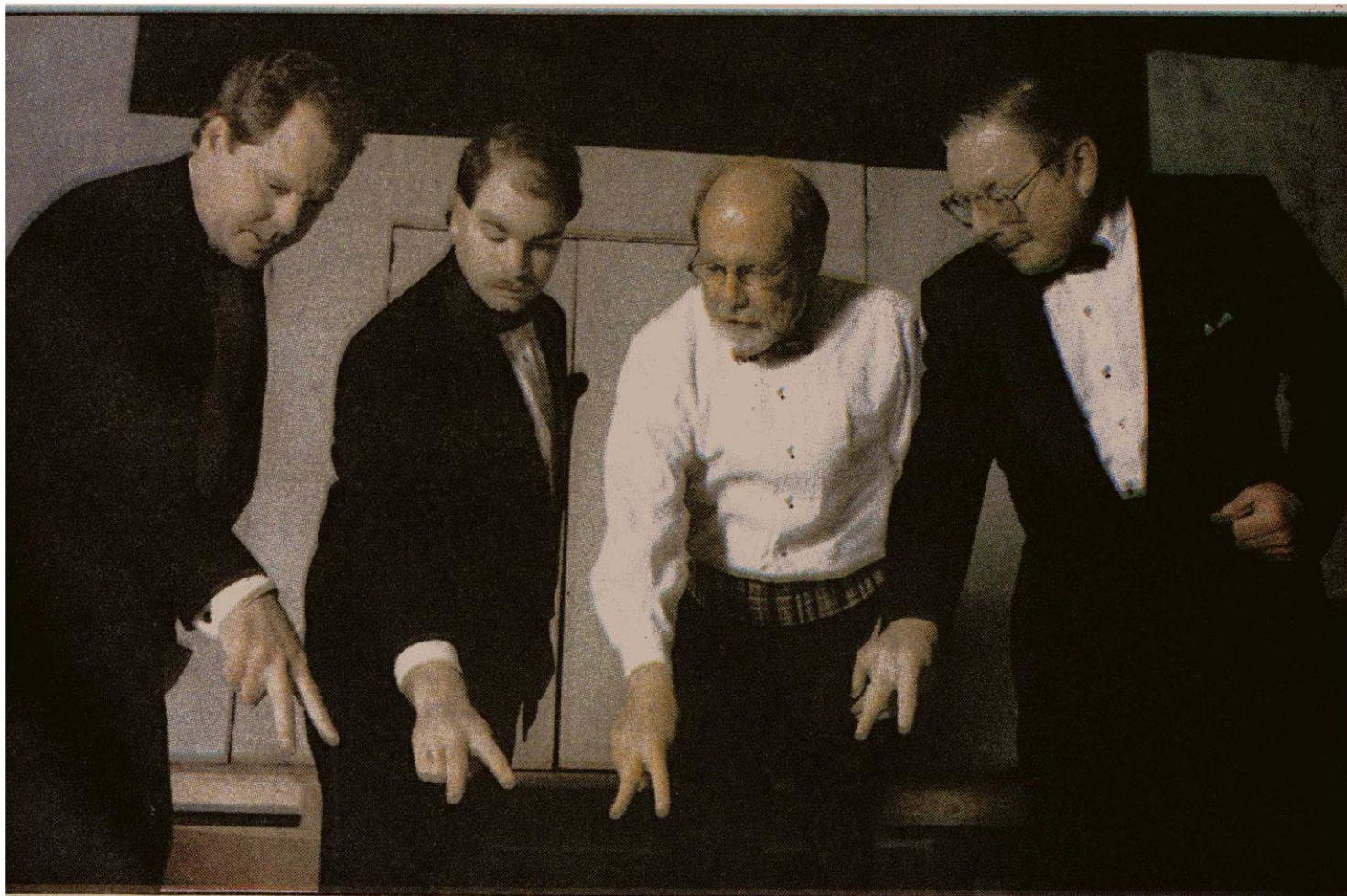
DeBolt in his sixth production; Jeff Pateau, by way of Gilroy High and Gavilan College drama departments; Christine McElroy, who moved from Los Angeles a few years ago; Steve Spencer, who last appeared in "Noises Off"; and Patt White, a veteran actor and producer who also serves on the SVCT board of directors.

Corneth, taking a moment to munch down his dinner — a few handfuls of trail mix — said he appreciates the blend of veterans and new faces. "I think the audience gets tired of seeing the same people."

Corneth, a veteran of 15 years, said he loves to tackle a good comedy.

There is some adult language in the show, which is probably suited for teens but definitely not for small children. "One of the things about Neil Simon characters is they wouldn't be the same without some language," Rod said.

But what takes center stage is the laughter. "You just can't not laugh at this play," said Corneth, who took the time to play theater critic. "If you want a good, light-hearted night on the town, go see this play."



Party-goers (from left) Steve Spencer, Jeff D. Patereau, Bill Corneth and Dick Debot try the old rock-scissors-paper routine to decide who will impersonate the shooting victim who police are trying to question.