

The Journal News

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THEATER | AN AMERICAN SUCCESS STORY COMES TO THE STAGE



Robert Krakovski, Kathleen Doyle, center, and Rachel Harker, cast members of "Bill W. and Dr. Bob," tour the home of Alcoholics Anonymous founder Bill Wilson in Bedford. Krakovski plays the lead role as Bill Wilson. Doyle plays Anne Smith and Harker plays Lois, Bill's wife.

Dave Kennedy/The Jour

Play traces AA's roots

Sean Gorman
The Journal News

BEDFORD
Among the more significant meetings in Bill Wilson's life, a biography notes, happened in 1934 when Ebby, his friend and former drinking buddy, tried to talk him into sobering up.

That fateful meeting and other events leading up to the founding of Alcoholics Anonymous are being depicted in "Bill W. and Dr. Bob" — an off-Broadway play about Wilson, his AA co-founder, Dr. Robert Smith, and their wives.

'Bill W. and Dr. Bob'

Information on tickets and show times can be found at www.bill-wanddrbob.com, or call Telecharge, 800-432-7250.

There's also a link from the Stepping Stones Foundation's Web site: www.stepsstones.org.

It premieres this month. A portion of the proceeds from the first Feb. 16 preview performances are going to Stepping Stones museum in Bedford, the former home of Wilson

and his wife, Lois.

"Bill always referred to Ebby as the guy who got him sober," said Annah Perch, the executive director of Stepping Stones.

Wilson, portrayed by actor Robert Krakovski, shuffled about in his socks and a blue robe — inebriated — during a rehearsal last week at Chelsea Studios in Manhattan. Ebby, who had become sober, refused a drink from him.

"You want to drink more than you want to live," says Ebby, played by Marc Carver.

Wilson's response is swift and beligerent.

Please see **PLAY, 8A**

Play traces roots of AA movement

PLAY, from 1A

"Look, you're not in my world!" he says. "I'm holed up, alone, here in the dark. I tried to come out, but I can't."

Wilson eventually did stop drinking, but after six months of being sober, he was in Akron, Ohio, tempted to drink again, when he sought out another alcoholic to speak with, according to Wilson's biography on the Stepping Stones Web site. After some calls, he found Smith and the two spoke for five hours. On June 10, 1935, the group was founded.

"It's a tremendous American success story," Janet Surrey, a clinical psychologist and the play's co-author, said after last week's rehearsal. "What happened with these two men changed the lives, impacted the lives, of so many people around the world."

Dr. Stephen Bergman, a psychiatrist who co-wrote the play, said the goal was to write a great play that was "authentic in terms of historical data."

"We knew, unless we wrote a play that everyone would want to see, we were wasting our time," Bergman said. "It's a play for



Seth Harrison/The Journal News
Director Rick Lombardo, left, discusses a scene with Stephen Bergman and Janet Surrey, authors of the play, at Chelsea Studios in Manhattan, where the play was being rehearsed.

everyone because it's a great story."

After last week's rehearsal, the writers and cast traveled to Stepping Stones at 62 Oak Road, where the couple lived for decades before Wilson's death in 1971 and his wife's death in 1988.

Lois Wilson helped to found Al-

Anon, a self-help group for families coping with an alcoholic relative.

"Actors always use their imagination. We always want to fill it up with as much research as we can," said Rick Lombardo, the director. "A resource like this (Stepping Stones) is priceless to us."

The play was performed about a year ago to sold-out crowds at the New Repertory Theatre in Boston.

"People came back to see this play three, four and five times," Lombardo said.

A review in The Boston Globe in March said the production has a strong cast and the play has a "flair for detail and character development." The review also said much of the drama seemed to be gone in the second act.

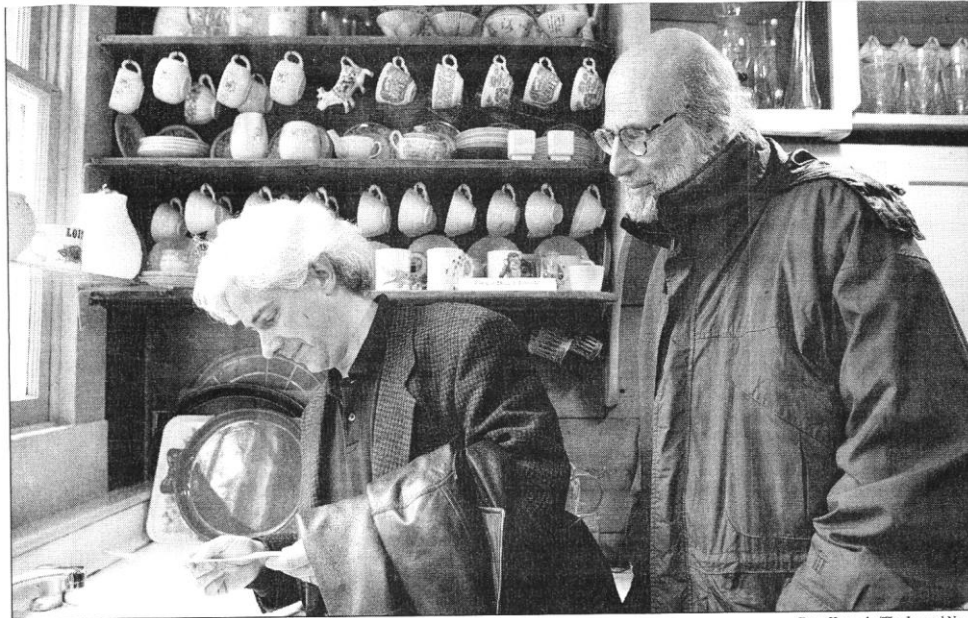
The playbill comes with a note that the production is not affiliated with or endorsed by Alcoholics Anonymous World Services Inc.

Perch, the Stepping Stones executive director, said the museum hopes to bring in between \$15,000 and \$18,000 from the Feb. 16 performance — which is on the verge of selling out.

After that performance, the play will be shown on a Tuesday-through-Sunday schedule.

"It's an opportunity to get to know two of Bedford's most historical figures," Perch said.

Reach Sean Gorman at sgorman@lohud.com or 914-666-6481.



Dave Kennedy/The Journal News
"Bill W. and Dr. Bob" director Rick Lombardo, left, and writer Stephen Bergman take in the details of the kitchen during a tour of the home of Alcoholics Anonymous founder Bill Wilson in Bedford Hills. The play is being held to raise money for the Stepping Stones Foundation, which oversees the home.



Seth Harrison/The Journal News
Actor Krakovski, playing the part of Bill Wilson, rehearses a scene at Chelsea Studios in Manhattan.