

Two (theater) seasons of love

By JOE HENDERSON
Special to The Star

Celia and David Thompson hadn't planned to celebrate their second wedding anniversary at the Theatre in the Park rehearsing for "Legally Blonde," but that's where they were on June 12.

It was a fitting location.

"We were thinking about something more exotic. But when rehearsal was scheduled that day we decided maybe being at the theater wasn't so bad after all. That's where we met back in 1997," David said.

Celia was working in the production of "Crazy for You" and

David was in "Guys and Dolls" that year. David's cousin introduced them at an all-cast party before the season started.

They returned to the scene for their anniversary this month.

"We went out to the theater early and had a picnic at the same place where the party was 15 years before," he said. "That made it a little more romantic."

They had several dates after the cast party, then went their separate ways. David graduated from Olathe East and stayed in Olathe to attend Mid-America Nazarene University. But Celia left for Southwest Missouri State in Springfield after she

graduated from St. Thomas Aquinas.

Then Celia worked in Branson for two years before she made enough money to go even farther, to pursue a career in musical theater in New York City. She ran into David's cousin one day, asked about him and eventually told David about a trip home she was planning.

"I asked her if she'd like to have a drink and talk over old times while she was home. We met and started talking and it was like we'd never been apart. We had so much in common,"

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David and Celia Thompson, who met while performing at Theatre in the Park, celebrated their second wedding anniversary June 12 while rehearsing for Theatre in the Park's production of "Legally Blonde."

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David said. "Our families are longtime friends, we knew a lot of the same people. It all came back. We ended up closing down the place."

They began dating regularly. Celia delayed her return to New York. Six months later David proposed and in 2010, they married and settled in Olathe.

Now they're a theater two-some. They've appeared in shows together at the Chestnut Fine Arts in Olathe five times and at several other area community theaters.

"It's nice being in shows together. We enjoy doing it as a couple, talking about the characters we're playing, how the show's going. Show business in New York was definitely a business. Now it's a hobby and fun," Celia said.

It's shaping up as a busy summer for the couple. Celia won the Kansas Mrs. America pageant in April and will represent Kansas in the Mrs. America U.S.A. pageant July 11-12 in Las Vegas.

"We're all going to be there, both families, relatives, everyone. It should be exciting," David said.

David will be back at Theatre in the Park later in July as Hot Blades Harry in "Urinetown," a role he took after the actor who was cast originally had to draw.

"Legally Blonde" opened Friday at The Theatre in the Park.

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CELIA THOMPSON

The show follows Elle, the pride of Delta Nu sorority at UCLA, who is dumped by her boyfriend, Warner, and chases after him to Harvard Law School.

Elle eventually turns to studying, ends up valedictorian of her class and finds love with Emmett, played by David.

"For once, I win the girl. Usually I'm just an ordinary guy, someone's sidekick," he said with a laugh.

Celia portrays Serena, one of Elle's faithful sorority sisters.

"I like playing Serena, she's sassy, definitely a side of my personality I don't get to bring out too often," Celia said. "It's fun to play someone you aren't like in real life."

Elle is played by Beth Benedict, who grew up in Lenexa, graduated from St. Thomas Aquinas in 2005 and now works in television and films in Santa Monica, Calif. She appeared at The Theatre in the Park in "Thoroughly Modern Millie" in 2007 and "The Wedding Singer" in 2009. She also performed at Starlight Theatre, Union Station and stage shows at Worlds of Fun before moving to California.

Brian Houchin, who lives in Shawnee, plays Warner. This is his 10th show at The Theatre. He was in "The Wedding Singer" with Benedict in 2009.

"I'm a bit of a villain in "Legally Blonde" because of the way Warner treats Elle. He's not really evil. He's just selfish, makes bad decisions and ignores the feelings of others. I enjoy playing him because I'm really not that kind of guy," Houchin said.

"Legally Blonde" runs tonight and Sunday and again June 28-July 1 at The Theatre in the Park in Shawnee Mission Park. Curtain time is 8:30 p.m. For more information go to www.theatreinthepark.org or call 913-236-1237.