

Tips for getting into Long Island theater

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Woody Allen once said, "Eighty percent of success in life is showing up." If that's true, then all it takes to fulfill a deferred dream to act onstage or work backstage is showing up at a community theater near you.

Just show up at an audition or an open meeting, says Jessica Cianciotto, president of Take-One Theatre in [Smithtown](#), "and we'll find something for you to do."

That doesn't mean you'll land the lead romantic role. You may be recruited to hunt for props, work the box office or aim the spotlight. But if it's a musical with a large ensemble behind the main players, you may get your first chance since high school or college to appear on stage.

Sounding a bit like a hooper from "[A Chorus Line](#)," Brian Payne, president of Theatre Box of [Floral Park](#), says of his troupe of volunteers: "We do it for love." Payne is directing Theatre Box's next show, the mystery musical "Curtains."

You want to be a [Broadway](#) star? You've probably come to the wrong place. But if you just want to be part of a show, here's how.

ACTING

Getting started is simple. It just takes courage. Check the audition notices. One of the best resources: everyone in Long Island theater, whether it's a hobby or a livelihood, checks Deb's Web, a site run by actress Debbie Starker, who's appeared in hundreds of shows in paying and nonpaying roles. [Debsliweb.homestead.com](#) carries audition notices and cast lists for dozens of shows on the Island and in [Queens](#), with links to most theaters. Or check the audition listings each Friday in Newsday's Explore LI section. Pay attention to the type of roles being cast. If you fit the description, be brave and show up. Even if you don't get the part, you've made a contact. Don't bother with an Equity company unless you have a union contract. But most companies, even those that pay actors a small stipend, welcome newcomers.

DIRECTING

By audition time, a director is already on board, advises Payne of Theater Box, who's directed more than 20 shows. But if you audition and land a part, even a small one, pay attention during rehearsals, get to know your new colleagues and at the right moment make



known your desire to direct a show someday. You may get a chance to "AD" - assistant direct - and learn the ropes. Volunteer to stage manage or assist. You'll learn what it takes to make sure everything's on time and in place on the set - including the actors.

SET/COSTUME DESIGN

If you can wield a hammer or a paintbrush, let out a hem or sew on a button, chances are you can rig a set or devise a costume. In community theater, the star of the previous show may be a "tech grunt" in the next, says Take-One's Cianciotto, who has "worked just about every job we have here." If you show up reliably and pitch in with sets or costumes, you'll likely get a designing credit - eventually - to your amateur resume.

MUSIC DIRECTOR OR CHOREOGRAPHER

Now we're talking about real talent. A troupe of volunteers won't have the time or resources to teach you, says John Hannon, president of Playcrafters, who produced and directed the company's most recent show, "The Guys." But if you can play the piano and sight-read music, you, too, can run a pit for a musical. Likewise, trained dancers are a real find in community theaters and become dance captains or choreographers "in short order," Hannon adds.

[>>View the complete list of Long Island community theater companies](#)

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