

## WEEKENDER

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SECTION

## Arena looks to the stars, trailblazing woman

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In a time when she wasn't allowed to operate large telescopes, American astronomer Henrietta Leavitt explored Earth's place in the cosmos.

"Silent Sky," a play reflecting Leavitt's life and society's ideas of the role of women at the turn of the last century, opens July 9 at Arena Dinner Theatre.

Born in 1868, Leavitt worked at Harvard College Observatory at the turn of the century as a "computer," or person who worked out mathematical calculations.

Leavitt was tasked with examining photographic plates to catalog

## IF YOU GO

**What:** "Silent Sky"**When:** Dessert served at 7:15 p.m., shows start at 8 p.m.; July 9, 15 and 16**Where:** Arena Dinner Theatre, 719 Rockhill St.**Admission:** \$35; literacyalliance.networkforgood.com

the brightness of stars, but in her spare time she began to develop a way to measure the distance between stars.

It was a groundbreaking piece of science that changed how we look at the cosmos.

"Silent Sky," written by Lauren

Gunderson, delves into Leavitt's discoveries and her frustrations with being a woman at the time, which meant she didn't get to do much with her discoveries before her death in 1921.

Director Gloria Minnich knows that might sound a little dry, but she says the family-friendly play is actually funny.

"It's her and two other women who work at Harvard," Minnich says. "And they just have a really great sense of humor."

It also has a beautiful ending that the director says left her cast of five in tears at the first read-through.



Courtesy

"Silent Sky" at Arena Dinner Theatre will star, from left, Bella Hadley, David Felts, Jen Poiry Prough, Rachel Dirig and Jennifer Rothenbush.

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## ARENA

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Arena and The Literacy Alliance are partnering for the production, which is a fundraiser for the organizations. They previously partnered for a digital per-

formance of "Salt & Pepper" in April 2021, a project that Minnich says was a success – in part because it raised awareness for each group with the other organization's usual network of supporters. Minnich is a member of Arena's board.

It was a collaboration the

groups were eager to repeat, but as Minnich says, "there aren't a whole heck of a lot of plays about literacy."

So Minnich and Literacy Alliance CEO Melinda Haines broadened the scope to women in education and education in general.

Not only does "Silent

Sky" deal with women in education in the early 19th century, some of the challenges they faced correspond to today. Not only getting an education but also "once you have that education, how do you contribute your ideas and make sure that they're heard," Minnich

says.

During productions of "Silent Sky," each of the 14 tables at Arena (as well as some other spaces in the theater) will be dedicated to a woman in Fort Wayne history such as educators Mable Holland, Betty Stein and Helen P. Brown; Journal

Gazette President Julie Inskeep; philanthropist Helene Foellinger; the Fort Wayne Daisies; and Catherine Dinklage, the first woman elected to Fort Wayne City Council.

Shows will feature desserts but not a full meal.

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