Play is dedicated to theater teacher

Barry cast stages Steel Magnolias

By GRACE LIM
Herald Staff Writer

The cast of Barry University’s production of Steel Magnolias is dedicating its performance to a teacher who devoted her life to the theater.

Patricia Minnagh, who taught theater at Barry University for 25 years, died June 18 in a car accident outside London. She was there doing research on a book about English puppeteers.

“Barry University theater and puppeteering were basically her life,” said Stephen Neal, theater instructor.

Before Minnagh left the United States, she decided to direct the play Steel Magnolias this fall. Neal decided to direct it after he read the script. Steel Magnolias is about a group of women who learned to live and cope after one of them dies.

“We thought about changing shows, but it’s perfect for her,” Neal said. “This is a comedy even though it deals with very serious issues. Pat wouldn’t have liked it if we got too maudlin.”

Neal said the cast, many of whom were taught by Minnagh, are excited about the play. “They are really psyched about doing this for her and her memories,” he said.

Kathi Novelli, who plays the diabetic daughter Shelby, said she remembers lessons Minnagh had taught.

“Now that she’s gone, everything she said to me about my acting is coming back,” she said.

Last year, Minnagh directed Novelli’s first performance in Twelve Angry Men.

“I just wish I could tell her, ‘I understand now what you meant,’” she said.

Novelli said Minnagh, whom the students called Miss M, taught them to love and respect theater.

“She made theater count,” Novelli said. “She taught us that theater is a tool that can be used in the world to make a statement, to make a difference.”

Minnagh won’t be forgotten, Novelli said.

“This may sound corny, but you can feel her presence,” Novelli said. “When I’m on stage, there’s no doubt that she’s there.”

BARRY UNIVERSITY PRODUCTION: Appearing in Steel Magnolias are Kathi Marie Novelli as Shelby, looking into mirror, and Elizabeth O’Leary, playing Shelby’s mother M’Lynn.