

AACTFest - Join the Fun!

by Ron Ziegler, AACT Festivals Coordinator

AACTFest is an exciting process, involving community theatres in every corner of the country, and on military bases in Europe.

It culminates in a national festival every two years that features 12 productions that have received top honors in their respective state and regional festivals—all of which adhere to a common set of rules documented in the *AACT Festival Handbook*. This ensures a level playing field for all.

A festival typically presents three to five shows per day, each one limited to sixty minutes or less. Each cast and crew have ten minutes to get their set out of a 10x10 square of backstage storage, and get it ready for “curtain.” After the performance professional adjudicators give their analysis to the cast, director and crew. Thus, everyone in the audience gets to see excellent theater, followed by positive, enlightening and engaging critiques.

Festivals typically present theater skills workshops as well, plus an awards party where the show that will go on to the next level is announced, and awards for acting, directing and producing are given.

Great reasons to enter a festival

- Fire up the imagination and interest of your group, and motivate them to think in new directions.
- See some of the best theatre around, and get great ideas for your next season.
- Meet terrific people who are doing exciting theatre.
- Stimulate creativity in your group, and get them to reach for higher ideals.
- Make the festival experience fun by producing and watching great shows, meeting wonderful people, and attending great parties.

AACTFest state festivals begin more than a year prior to the national festival. All regional festivals must be completed by the first weekend in May prior to the national festival, to give advancing companies enough time to prepare. The AACTFest cycle is named for the year in which the national festival occurs.

AACTFest 2017 begins soon

The first of the AACTFest 2017 State festivals will occur in the spring of this year; by the end of summer at least four festivals will have already taken place.

Planning for the 2017 festival cycle began before the 2015 cycle ended last summer with the national festival in Grand Rapids. The AACT Festival Committee solicits input during each cycle, so the process may be fine-tuned for the next cycle to provide the best experience possible for participants. Every two years the *AACTFest Handbook* is updated to reflect this fine tuning, so the process may begin again with everyone following the same set of rules. The *AACTFest 2017 Handbook* will be available by February 2016 at aact.org

State Festivals

State festival sites are chosen by state theatre associations or by a volunteering theatre, and the preparations begin. A state festival chair is chosen and he or she recruits other volunteers and begins the organizing.

State festival preparation begins as much as two years prior to the event. A theatre facility is secured, a hotel (or hotels) selected, adjudicators engaged, and volunteers recruited and assigned. Details on the process can be found in AACT's publication *A Guide to Hosting AACTFest*, found on the AACT Website under "Festivals and Events."

Regional Festivals

Productions advance from the state festivals to a regional festival, which are structured with the same attention to detail, with the added responsibility of hosting out-of-state guests (lodging, long distance arrangements, etc.). Details of regional festivals are also available in *A Guide to Hosting AACTFest*.

The National Festival

AACTFest 2017 National Festival culminates in Rochester, MN June 26 - July 1, 2017. By the time AACTFest 2017 ends, there will have been approximately 40 state festivals with more than 200 theatre productions, followed by 60 or so theatres performing in regional festivals. The national festival also includes workshops, social events, sightseeing and networking opportunities, ending with a festival awards presentation. It's an invigorating process, and one worth joining, in a celebration of American community theatre!