‘Chicago’ breaks attendance records

By Allyson Betot
A round the Town

This year’s University Theatre fall production was the well-known musical “Chicago,” which ran from Nov. 9-12.

In the last 20 years no University Theatre production has had more than 2,000 attendees. This year’s production of “Chicago” broke the record with over 2,000 in attendance.

Breaking records

The previous record holder for highest attendance rate for a student production is unknown. According to David Thaggard, the assistant executive director of Givens Performing Arts Center and previous UNCP student, there has never been a student show with over 2,000 attendees.

A movie version of “Chicago” was made in 2002 and won six Oscar Awards. It has been suggested by the actors and crew members of the student production that the popularity of the movie led to the popularity of the UNCP production.

“Chicago is a well-known musical and also a well-known movie. Since college students are usually more familiar with movies than live theater, the fairly recent movie probably boosted its popularity,” said Brianna Goodwin, stage manager for “Chicago” and previous student productions.

Pre-production

Auditions for “Chicago” were held in August and rehearsals began the second week in September. However, a great amount of work went into the show before the actors were even cast.

“The directors started planning for the show in early spring before the 2011 spring semester ended,” Goodwin said.

Costumes, sets and props had to be designed, built or bought in advance so that actors would have enough time to rehearse in an actual performance like setting.

Natalie Smith had several jobs in the production. She was the associate director, choreographer, costume designer and even filled in as actor for the show.

Smith and the wardrobe chief Jalessa Malloy worked all semester designing, researching and buying costumes for the 1920s jazz era the play was set in.

With a cast and crew of over 65 people, it was important for the pre-production and the production to run smoothly.

“As the stage manager, I would say it was most challenging to keep several groups of people informed regarding everything from rehearsal schedules to light cues,” Goodwin said. Rehearsals began in early September everyday after classes were over. Rehearsals concentrated on dance, music and acting.

“The rehearsals were very time consuming, yet they ended up producing a very well prepared performance,” said Pepper Jensen, a sophomore theatre major.

“Chicago” was Jensen’s first performance with the University Theatre.

Smith, as choreographer, stuck to Fosse style dancing which was common for 1920s jazz shows as well as the original production of the musical “Chicago” in 1975, which was based on a play of the same name in 1926.

“I felt like the choreography did a sufficient job of creating the intended atmosphere for the show,” Jensen said.

The reaction of audience members was one of thorough enjoyment.

Audience reaction

Among the audience members for the Nov. 11 showing of “Chicago” were Chancellor Kyle R. Carter and his wife, Sarah.

“I thought they did such a fantastic job,” Sarah Carter said.

“The costumes were amazing and glamorous. They were perfect, especially the girls’ costumes for Billy Finn’s scenes,” Mindy Hubbard said.

Hubbard and her friends enjoyed the show so much they came back to watch it again the next night.