

# 'Facing Our Truth' packs the Colonial Theater

Posted Monday, February 8, 2016 2:40 am

By Phil Demers

**PITTSFIELD** — A WAM Theatre, Multicultural BRIDGE and Berkshire Theatre Group collaboration drew hundreds on Saturday for a stage treatment of modern racial issues.

The event, called "Facing Our Truth," coincided with the subject of the six one-act plays which comprised it: Trayvon Martin. Saturday would have been the slain Florida teen's 21st birthday.

The outsized turnout made the event a wild success.

"We thought we'd be doing this in a coffeehouse in front of 20 people," Yvette 'Jamuna' Sirker, a local teacher and playwright who took part in the event, said.

Instead, the event occupied — and packed the house — of Pittsfield biggest stage, The Colonial Theatre.

New Black Fest of New York City and local sponsors, most notably Greylock Federal Credit Union and Berkshire Gas, came together to fund the event. More than 40 thespians who took part.

Luci Leonard, 44, of West Stockbridge not only acted in one of the plays, but she watched her Monument Mountain teenage son Alex Leonard gunned down as Martin in one of the plays.

She said she refused to watch the dramatic climax in rehearsals.

"I want to have a visceral reaction to seeing it happen," Leonard said. "This is our experience as people of color. You feel this everyday when they leave you, there's a fear of what could occur."

Sharing the stage with her son was a milestone moment, she said.

"I'm a proud parent. This has brought us closer together," Leonard said.

Even Gwendolyn Hampton-VanSant, CEO and founding director of Multicultural BRIDGE, took to the stage for the first time of her life for one of the plays, "Dressing."

The play concerns a black mother trying to warn her teenage child that what he chooses to wear can become a matter of life-and-death, if the wrong person perceives him the wrong way.

"I'm no natural actress; it was going to take something this serious to get me out there," Hampton-VanSant told The Eagle. "I don't think there are many rural communities like us doing this kind of work."

She added, "It's intense. Being a live reading, it's like you're going through it with the audience."

Speaking of audience, turnout dwarfed expectations. More than 300 tickets presold and hundreds more walked in.

"We tripled our expectations," Hampton-VanSant said.

Following the event, participating actors and actresses took part in a panel discussion with the audience.

"What we've done is to galvanize the community and bring it together," Sirker said. "The majority of people I've spoken to understand and care about these issues, which made Berkshire County a great place to host something like this."



Director Enrico Spada rehearses with Devon Lennon, Courtney Stewart, and Brittany Nicholson on the opening day of their play 'Some Other Kid,' a part of 'Facing Our Truth,' a series of one-act plays about the ideas of race, privilege, and Trayvon Martin at the Colonial Theatre in Pittsfield.



**Actors rehearse on the opening day of their play 'Colored,' a part of 'Facing Our Truth,' a series of one-act plays about the ideas of race, privilege, and Trayvon Martin at the Colonial Theatre in Pittsfield.**



**Luci Leonard and Joseph Gunn run through their tech rehearsal on the opening day of their play 'Night Vision,' a part of 'Facing Our Truth,' a series of one-act plays about the ideas of race, privilege, and Trayvon Martin at the Colonial Theatre in Pittsfield.**



