



Properties Master Karin Rabe Vance

## MILESTONES:

### KARIN RABE VANCE

We are proud to spotlight members of the Alley Theatre family as they reach milestones onstage and behind the scenes. Literary intern Henry Nash sat down to talk with Properties Master Karin Rabe Vance, who is celebrating her 15th year at the Alley.

#### Henry Nash: Would you tell us your Alley Theatre origin story?

**Karin Rabe Vance:** In the summer of 2003, the Society of Properties Artisan Managers (SPAM) held a conference at the Alley. I came down here, thought, "nice building, cool place, I could work there." I'd applied here right out of school. And then I applied here again and it was like "yeah, yeah." And then the third time I was actually offered an artisan position – and I turned it down. That was in '98 or '99. And then Randy, who was the Props Master, announced he was leaving. I remember talking to Hugh Landwehr, who is one of our designers, and I'm like, "this job's open at the Alley, thinking about applying for it." And he was like, "I'll call Kristin (Fox, former Production Manager) right now, get your stuff together, I'll give you 'til Friday." So I got my stuff together, sent it in, was flown in for an interview. Kristin offered me the job. And I kind of freaked out. I loved the Theatre, but I didn't want to leave Buffalo. I went to my boss, and I said, "Jeff, I've been offered this job, I don't know what to do." And he goes, "Well, you have two options. You can stay here and be unemployed or you can take the job." And I'm like "Why would I be unemployed?" And he says "Because I don't hire idiots, and if you don't take that job you're an idiot."

#### HN: Was there a moment you realized the Alley could be a long-term artistic home?

**KR:** I think it was a series of little moments over time of being really proud of the work that we put on stage and developing and building a really incredible team. My favorite thing, on

every production, is watching the previews. I like to stand in the back of the house and watch the audience watch the show. It is incredibly gratifying to see their reactions. Our audiences are amazing, and they get so into it. So, yeah. We all work really well together and it just became a family. If there was one "aha moment" at all, it was probably after I started dating Andy (Andrew Vance, Lighting Supervisor). I'm like, "oh, now we're a theatre couple. Huh! It's going to be real hard to go anywhere else! Good thing I like it here!"

#### HN: (laughter) So, then, I have to ask now. How did you, how did that—

**KR:** How did we start dating? I don't know! There were rumors that we were dating.

#### HN: Before you were dating??

**KR:** Yeah! And we went out to dinner, and I'm like "so, what do you think of these rumors?" He's like, "what are you talking about? What rumors?" And I'm like, "well, there's all these rumors that we're dating." He's like, "oh! . . . Are we dating . . . ?" I'm like, "I don't know, are we dating?" And we started dating. And then a year later he proposed, and then a year after that we got married. Because sometimes the theatre knows.

#### HN: Tell me about some of the most memorable props—

**KR:** Good or bad?

#### HN: How about one of each.

**KR:** Oh my god, there have been so many.

**HN: What's the deal with those Picasso statues in your office?**

**KR:** We did a show called *A Weekend with Pablo Picasso* by Herbert Siguenza in 2011. We had permission from the Picasso estate to replicate some statues, including his goat Esmeralda, so we did. We had photos of them, we replicated them. They were great, they were fantastic. The people from the estate came by to see the work, and they were like "Oh. No. Nononono, these are too close." They were genuinely concerned that they would be mistaken for real Picassos.

**HN: That is wild.**

**KR:** And we were supposed to destroy the goat.

**HN: But the goat was too dear.**

**KR:** The goat has never been seen. . . We ended up making a dachshund.



The dachshund statue from *A Weekend with Pablo Picasso*. Photo by Jann Whaley.

**HN: A dachshund.**

**KR:** Kind of the same idea as the goat, but a dog.

**HN: And Pablo Picasso did not make a dachshund.**

**KR:** He did not make a dachshund.

**HN: Can you give us an update on the Harvey recovery?**

**KR:** We were able to save, I think, 7% of the props. In December, we finally got prop storage set back up again. We got all our shelves up, we got all the boxes of stuff we had salvaged unpacked. The shelves are a little emptier. But they'll get full. They'll get full again.

**HN: For those who might not know, tell us about a typical day in the life of a Props Master.**

**KR:** Meetings.

**HN: Meetings?**

**KR:** It's all about communication.

**HN: Yeah?**

**KR:** Everything's about communication. That's what I do all day long. We start our day at 7 a.m. We meet as a shop and we read all the rehearsal reports and performance reports from what happened the day before. We have to read those to know how things are going, what we need to do to fix things, to make things as easy as possible on everybody else, and make sure the props work for the actors. So, we start every day with a meeting to discuss everything as a team. And then I spend most of the rest of the day talking to our designers, planning upcoming shows, and doing a lot of shopping. I don't build much anymore, because I have so many awesome builders. Sometimes they'll save me one. I got to make the microphone in *Twelfth Night*.

**HN: Oooh!**

**KR:** Yeah, occasionally, I'm like "that one's mine." Primarily, I do fabric, upholstery, paper goods, crafty stuff. Nobody wants Karin building a piece of furniture.

**HN: I guess that's why there are carpenters.**

**KR:** That's why we have a prop carpenter and that's why we have a soft goods artisan and that's why we have a crafty person and that's why we have a painter, because they all do something a little different. And together? It's a beautiful thing.



Jay Sullivan with the microphone Karin made in *Twelfth Night*. Photo by Lynn Lane.