

Adaptation of *Ellen Foster* to be performed

By Dina Di Maio

Almost ten years ago, John Creagh read a book and fell in love with the story. In fact, he loved it so much, he decided to prepare it for the stage.

The book was *Ellen Foster* by Raleigh novelist Kaye Gibbons.

"I read it when it first came out and wanted to do it then," said Creagh.

So he adapted the novel himself. Although he wasn't pleased with his adaptation, he finished it. He then asked Gibbons, who owned the rights to *Ellen Foster*, for permission to perform it. She told him that Hallmark Hall of Fame was turning the novel into a TV movie, and that he couldn't perform it at that time. Gibbons did tell him that a professional company in Philadelphia had performed it already.

But Creagh didn't shelve the idea just yet. He contacted Aaron Posner, writer and director of *Ellen*

Foster, at the Arden Theatre Company in Philadelphia. Posner agreed to let Creagh use his version of the play.

"He has been very generous about changing some things," Creagh said. Posner's performance of the play in 1994 received rave reviews from numerous Philadelphia-area critics.

So after a few years, Gibbons gave Meredith permission to perform the novel before it became a TV movie.

"I'm asked for permission a lot, and I don't give it," she said in a telephone interview. She gave Meredith permission because "it was local" and she "knew the script."

"I trusted [Creagh] with it, and I don't give permission to people I don't trust," Gibbons said.

So after years of planning and pushing, Creagh finally got his dream of producing *Ellen Foster*, a play he describes as "perfect" for a women's college because of its heroine, Ellen. Ellen, a young girl from North Carolina, must battle poverty, abuse, and neglect at the hands of many family members, but she comes out triumphant.

Creagh said *Ellen Foster* is a "tri-

umph of the human spirit."

The play's script sticks pretty closely to the novel, as does the TV script, with minor changes for performance on stage. Some dialogue not in the book was added, and the actors did a little improvising as well.

"Ninety-five percent of the words in the play are verbatim," Creagh said. "It's as close to the original as we could make it." Creagh noted that the first three pages of the script are exactly like the novel.

Rehearsals for *Ellen Foster* are currently underway. The cast of 15 has been working extra hard, "five nights a week for five weeks—about 250 hours," said Creagh.

One woman, Phyllis Gay, was sitting in on try-outs and considering auditioning. Creagh told her to read for a part right there. She said yes, and now she's playing the parts of Starletta's mom and Mavis.

For die-hard *Ellen Foster* fans, the wait for the TV movie is just about over. It is scheduled for a September release. Gibbons is pleased. "Sometimes I feel as though I've lost control of it," she said, "but it's been so long since I've written it." She feels that Hallmark will do a good job as well.

Opening night for the play is February 27. Gibbons will be coming to a performance with "about 13 family members."

"If I didn't expect it to be good, I wouldn't go," she said.

When asked what she hopes people will gain from her story, Gibbons said she doesn't write for "social reasons or to entertain."

She writes for herself. "I need a job that pleases me everyday and invariably pleases other people," she said.

Creagh, on the other hand, said, "If people have a good cry at this play, then I will be satisfied."

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- Opportunity to talk with faculty, current students and alumnae about academic major options, their benefits and career potentials.
- Wednesday, Feb. 21- Drop by between 4:30-6:30 p.m. Belk Dining Hall Stringfield side
- Door prizes and refreshments, of course! Opportunity to declare your major on site!

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- Register with the Career Center by attending the orientation session at Kresge Auditorium on Tuesday, Feb. 27, 5:30-6:15 p.m. No pre registration.
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- Details in Career Center, 2nd Gate

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- May 24-June 9, in Charleston, SC

- Complete Details in Career Center, Application deadline is Feb. 20

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