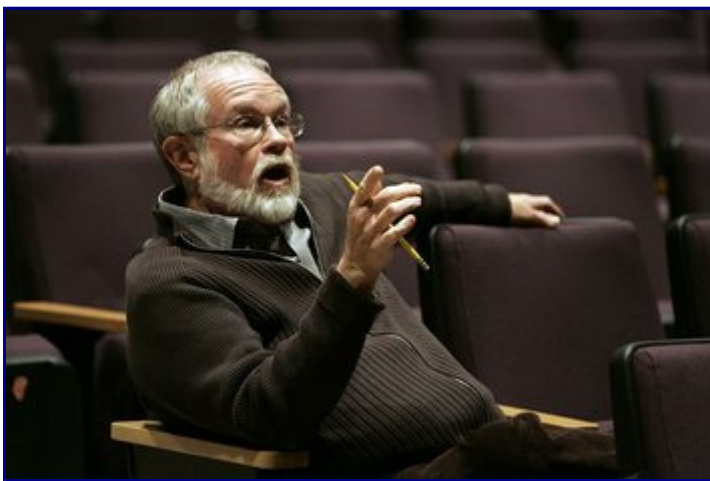


Lights are going out on drama teacher's career

By [Blanca Gonzalez](#), UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

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Sean M. Haffey / Union-Tribune

Westview High School drama teacher Doug Smith directs the play "Grease." Smith, who started the theater program at Westview, is retiring this year.

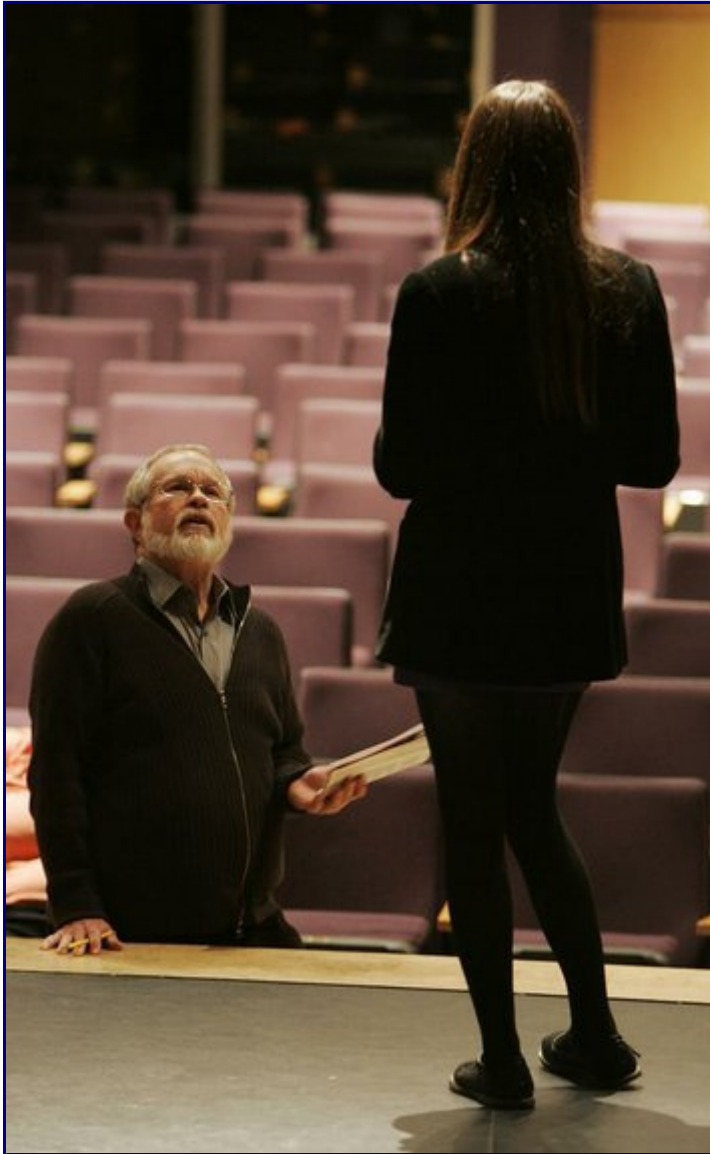


Photo by Sean M. Haffey - Union-Tribune

Westview High School drama teacher Doug Smith gives instruction to Megan Neubauer who is playing Rizzo in the play "Grease."

Doug Smith

Age: 63

What: retiring from teaching in June

Where: eight years at Fallbrook High School, 16 years at Mt. Carmel High School, eight years at Westview High School

Favorite play: "Our Town"

Teaching philosophy: Love the art in yourself, not yourself in the art.

'Grease'

Where: Westview Theatre,

13500 Camino del Sur

When: 7:30 p.m. April 22, 23, 24, 29, 30 and May 1;

2 p.m. matinee April 24

Ticket prices: \$6 for April 24 matinee; \$8 for general and \$12 for premium tickets for all other performances

More information: westviewtheatre.com

The curtain will come down on Doug Smith's teaching career this spring after more than 30 years of inspiring and guiding high school drama students, but for now, the show goes on.

During a recent afternoon rehearsal of "Grease" at Westview High School's theater, he conferred with his student director, gave his cast acting tips and went over costume choices and set-design issues with parent volunteers.

The popular musical, which fittingly ends with a group of students leaving high school, will be Smith's last production at Westview. He started the theater program when the Rancho Peñasquitos school opened in 2002. Smith came to Westview from Mt. Carmel, where he taught for 16 years and built an award-winning theater program. He did the same at Westview, which has won several trophies in recent years at the Fullerton College Theatre Festival.

Smith was named the 2008 Outstanding Educator of the Year by the California Educational Theatre Association, but he is quick to credit his students for the honor. "It was very gratifying, but any accolades that come my way are really a reflection of what my students have accomplished," Smith said.

His former students include Adam Lambert, who catapulted to fame after his turn on "American Idol."

"Adam was tremendous. I always knew he was going to be spectacular," Smith said of the Mt. Carmel graduate.

He recalls casting Lambert as Bottom in a production of "A Midsummer Night's Dream." "Bottom was Adam," Smith said of Shakespeare's energetic, extroverted character who volunteers to play several roles in a play within the play. "Adam wanted to do everything — working on sets, costumes, makeup, props. I thought, he's going to be a producer because this kid wants to do it all."

While he's delighted with Lambert's success and that of other students who have gone on to acting and singing careers, Smith is just as proud of those who have gone into the technical side of the arts and other professions.

His former students include professional lighting designers, stage managers, teachers and at least one lawyer. Smith said a young trial lawyer told him his work in the theater helped him speak with

conviction in court.

Smith said he was gratified to know he was “an academic grandfather,” due to a former student who became a teacher and recently told him that one of her students also went into teaching.

“The best thing about my job is that I get the privilege and the pleasure of working with great kids,” Smith said. “They love life, they love each other, and they love their craft.”

Many of them also love Smith. Mt. Carmel graduate Dan Froistad recently set up a “Fans of Doug Smith” Facebook page to allow former students to express their appreciation, reconnect with castmates and share memories. The page has more than 400 members so far, and there are plans for a big retirement party in June that will double as a Westview Theater fundraiser.

Smith, who is a married father of five and grandfather of five, is known to take his home life to work with him. His wife, Bobbi, has served stints as set designer and property mistress, and their children have been on the stage and behind the scenes, painting and helping build sets.

Daughter Jill Smith Blackwell, who attended Mt. Carmel, said the family has seen their household furniture onstage for a play, and her father once borrowed something from his own mother’s closet for a production of “West Side Story.”

“My grandmother goes to the play and sees (the character) Anita wearing her negligee, a gorgeous black and pink chiffon number that was perfect for the period,” Blackwell said. “She was mortified.”

Smith grew up in Fallbrook. Although the local high school didn’t have a drama department at the time, the school produced a senior play every year, so he had to wait until his final year to act in a school production. After graduation, he attended Palomar College and the University of California Los Angeles, his parents’ alma mater.

He considered an acting career but also considered his father’s wise words about the difficulty of making a living as an actor.

“I knew I wanted a profession that involved public speaking and working with people,” Smith said. “My dad steered me into the direction of teaching. I took to it like a duck to water.”

He earned a teaching credential from San Diego State University and a master’s degree in education from National University.

Smith taught at Fallbrook High School for eight years before taking a break from teaching to help run a family business. He returned to teaching in the late 1980s, when he joined the staff at Mt. Carmel.

After decades of teaching, Smith knows he’ll miss interacting with students. He might do some private coaching after retiring and maybe some acting in community theater, he said. For now, he’s making sure that he gets the best out of his students and that audiences for Westview’s spring musical get a great show.

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