

KEY PENINSULA NEWS

On Sunday, Sept. 23, Women In Action will host a special performance of the critically acclaimed play by Karen Brody, "BIRTH," in Gig Harbor. The play is based on more than 100 interviews Brody conducted with mothers across America who gave birth between the years 2000 and 2004. The one-day-only Gig Harbor premiere will be directed by Key Peninsula resident Kimberly Oakes, who is also a practicing labor doula with a background in theater and a yoga instructor at Key Center Fitness.

The story of eight women, BIRTH delivers a theatrical experience that melds the unbridled hilarity, the unexpected poignancy, and the tragic truth about power in maternity care today; the key roles are performed by eight Key Peninsula and Gig Harbor area actresses.

"Proceeds from this local production will go to benefit ICAN – The International Cesarean Awareness Network," Oakes said. ICAN's mission is to improve maternal-child health by preventing unnecessary cesarean births through education, providing support for cesarean recovery, and promoting Vaginal Birth After Cesarean (VBAC).

The audience is invited to participate in an open talkback session that will be staffed by local obstetricians, midwives and labor doulas directly following the performance. Members of the audience will be able to discuss current childbirth practices with these professionals, with a special emphasis on vaginal birth after cesarean. Oaks' goal is to get a dialogue going after the show.

Brody started the organization Birth On Labor Day (BOLD) after she wrote her play "BIRTH" in order to form a global movement to promote motherfriendly maternity care through grassroots events that use the arts to educate communities and take action on maternity care issues. More than 30 cities have hosted the play and in September it will be performed at venues around the world in cities including Seattle, San Diego, Ontario, Houston, Boston, Chicago, Maui, and Amsterdam.

In 2006, BOLD's first year, performances of "BIRTH" raised more than \$10,000 for local maternity care groups. This year, the organization expects that number to more than triple. Oaks said, "Similar to the 'The Vagina Monologues' success around the world in its efforts to end violence against women, BOLD performances of 'BIRTH' uses the arts to give educational performances that will serve to improve birthing options and safety for mothers."

Oaks is the local organizer for BOLD 2007 for this area, in addition to directing and acting in the play. "It is a lot to take on, but I am excited at the opportunity to raise awareness and get a conversation going in our community about childbirth practices in the U.S.," she said.

Oaks, who grew up in Edmonds, graduated from New York University with a bachelor's of fine arts in theater. She is currently enrolled in the Tacoma Community College's nursing program. After graduation she will be able to apply to local midwife schools and is already talking about next year's play and adding more productions. She is also looking for more sponsors for the 2008 season.

The play is scheduled for 3 p.m. at the Gateway Point Business Park. Tickets are \$10 and can be purchased at the door or online at www.brownpapertickets.com (type in BOLD Gig Harbor in the search field for ticket info and directions).