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# The Arts

Winston-Salem Journal • Assistant Editor Lynn Felder • (336) 727-7298 • dfelder@wsjournal.com

**Game of Oscars**  
TUNCSA alum Margaret Qualley in nominated film 'Once Upon ...'; 'Throne' fave gets show  
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# HOMERUN: WFU alum Marc Palmieri came to play ball and left a playwright

BY LYNN FELDER  
Winston-Salem Journal

In 1989, Marc Palmieri came to Wake Forest University to play baseball. He left four years later as a writer of plays and an actor.

Palmieri, from Long Island, New York, had been drafted that same year by the Toronto Blue Jays right out of high school. But instead of going to Toronto, Palmieri, with urging from his parents, came to Wake Forest on a full athletic scholarship.

He left with a bachelor's degree in speech, communications and theater arts, and next weekend, one of his plays, "Levittown," will have its regional premiere in Winston-Salem.

### If you go

**What:** 40-Plus Stage Co. presents "Levittown."  
**When:** 7:30 p.m. Feb. 21 and 28; 2 p.m. Feb. 22, 23, 29 and March 1  
**Where:** Mountcastle Black Box theater, Milton Rhodes Center for the Arts, 251 N. Spruce Street, Winston-Salem.  
**Cost:** \$20, \$16 for seniors 60 and older, \$12 for students  
**Info and tickets:** [www.rhodesartscenter.org/buy-tickets/](http://www.rhodesartscenter.org/buy-tickets/) or 336-747-1414

The 40-Plus Stage Co. is producing "Levittown," and one of Palmieri's former professors John E. R. "Jerr" Friedenberg is directing. Friedenberg recently retired from WFU.

Palmieri will be in town to see the final performance on March 1.

Another retired professor Harold Tedford was instrumental in turning the athlete into a thespian, but not before flunking him out of his Introduction to Theater class.

Palmieri says that he actually got a D, which would allow him to repeat the class, if he chose.

"I had a rule that anyone missing six classes had to make up three of them," Tedford said.

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JOHN PAINZ

Marc Palmieri attended WFU and wrote "Levittown."



COURTESY JOHN FRIEDENBERG

John Friedenberg is directing "Levittown" for the 40-Plus Theatre.

## Palmieri

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"He had more absences than he could afford and ended up with a bad grade — because of attendance."

"It was the earliest-in-the-morning class," Palmieri said. "And I thought, 'I'm a jock; I'm not a theater person.'"

A couple of years later, Palmieri ran into Tedford in the Fine Arts Building, and Tedford said, "Marc, why don't you take another theater class?"

"That's what he would do," Palmieri said. "He would recruit students. That meeting coincided with me seeing my first real theater play, 'Night of the Iguana,' at Wake. I asked him if I could take the class over, and he squeezed me in.

"I got an A, and I never looked back."

After graduation, Palmieri moved back to New York where he has had a varied career in theater and film as a writer and actor. "Levittown" is the second play in his Long Island Trilogy, the first being "The Groundling" and the third being the just-completed "To Every Season."

"It's brand new," he said. "My agent has sent it out, and it's sitting on many desks on theaters throughout the country."

A collection of plays for middle schoolers, *S(COOL) DAYS*, is being published by Brooklyn Publishers and will be

released in the spring. Dramatists Play Service publishes his four other playbooks, including "Poor Fellas" and "Carl The Second."

Palmieri's career has come full circle. He is currently an instructor in communication studies at Mercy College in Dobb's Ferry, New York. In addition to his bachelor's degree from WFU, Palmieri has two master's degrees in creative writing from the City College of New York.

"I teach in the School of Liberal Arts, and I am a great example of what a liberal arts education can do for you," he said. "It gives you a chance for discovery of self and instills a passion to learn and to continue to learn.

"It allowed me to stumble into something that I fell in love with."

Tedford said that while he was still at Wake, Palmieri sometimes house sat for the Tedford family, and they wound up traveling together to Wake's property in Venice, Italy, the year that Tedford retired, 1998.

"We got to know him pretty well," Tedford said. "We went to his wedding ... I liked him because he chose to go in a strange direction for someone who was a baseball scholarship athlete."

"Wake Forest expanded my horizons," Palmieri said. "The experience that I had in the theater there really modeled the way I wanted to work in the the-

ater as a professional — and a future teacher — a very welcoming attitude toward newcomers, a real emphasis in working on a team — like sports — and a standard of excellence."

Palmieri's wife, Kristen, teaches elementary school on Long Island, and they have two daughters who are involved in sports and theater.

Palmieri graduated second in all-time wins in the school's history, pitching for the Deacons. He served as varsity pitching coach at Chaminade High School in Mineola, NY, coaching for 14 years and coaches his daughters in soccer and volleyball.

But that's not all. "I've been taking them to plays," he said.

### The play's the thing

Palmieri's "Levittown" focuses on the Maddigan family as they plan their daughter's wedding. The daughter, Colleen, has been estranged from her father since he and her mother divorced. Kevin, her brother, hopes the wedding will be an occasion to reunite the family. Kevin prevails upon Colleen to meet with Richard, their father, and invite him to the wedding. A history of hurt, resentment, and guilt overtake the discussion, and a reunion is threatened.

"Levittown" draws its name from the communities constructed to provide homes for the G. I.'s returning home after WWII.

Grandfather Edmond, a vet, still lives in the house he bought after the war. The home harbors family secrets and history as grandson Kevin and his mother Kathleen live with the old man in the family home.

The play was first presented in 2004 and opened in New York City at Axis Company in 2006. It was a Backstage "Critic's Pick" in 2009 when it played at Theatre at Saint Clements in New York.

Friedenberg said that his is the first time he has directed adults rather than students. Forty-Plus Stage Co. emphasizes productions that feature actors age 40 and over in age-appropriate roles and themes of particular interest to older adults.

"Students have to interpolate everything from the script," he said. "Adults can work with material from their own experience as well as the script.

"We've got a good cast. They are working hard and coming up with good work."

Palmieri said, "I can't believe my good fortune — to have it done in that city, which I love, to have it directed by John who has kept me in contact with Wake Forest for all these years — he's had me down to teach workshops and meet students.

"To have 'Levittown' produced with those people in that place is a great gift."

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