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## Suwannee Valley Players perform Sanders Family Christmas Musical;

*Shows are this weekend and the following two weekends*



**A-Burl Sanders, played by Ron Vandermark, opens the play with a humorous and sometimes serious look at his life. Behind him are June Sanders played by Sandra Tapia and Pastor Mervin Oglethorpe played by Caleb Whitman.**

### Story and Photos

**By Terry Witt, Senior Staff Writer © Dec. 1, 2017 at 11:57 p.m.**

**CHIEFLAND** -- After Pearl Harbor was attacked in 1941 and the country was thrust into World War II, the Sanders family gathered one last time at Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church in Tennessee for a sing along.

The youngest of the family singing group, Dennis Sanders, a Baptist minister, had volunteered to fight for the United States Marine Corps and no doubt the family was worried about Dennis. They tried not to show it.

The Sanders family agreed to perform at Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church as Christmas approached, knowing they probably wouldn't gather as a family singing group for a long time as the war raged overseas and caused great hardships at home.

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The cast of Sanders Family Christmas performs a southern gospel song. Seen here are (from left) Sandra Tapia, Caleb Whitman, Ryan Teden, Lanette Six, Ron Vandermark, Valdeen Fletcher, Sasha Bowen, Angie Acevedo and on the far right Rhonda Stephenson and Connie Fletcher.



Sasha Bohen as Denise Sanders, Sandra Tapia as June Sanders and Ryan Teden as Dennis Sanders get ready to belt out a tune in spite of a sour grapes expression on Denise's face. She doesn't sing.

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**Rhonda Stephenson and Connie Fletcher are the Amen Ladies.**



**The bluegrass musicians accompanying the musical are Andy Bryson, Diane Bryson and Ted Patrick.**

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Such is the setting for the upcoming Suwannee River Players production of Sanders Family Christmas, a play that is a comedic musical you won't want to miss.

The family musical is saturated with humor and a few serious scenes played by a talented cast of actors. The lead role of Burl Sanders belongs to first-time actor Ron Vandermark who performs like a seasoned actor.

The Amen Ladies, Connie Fletcher and Rhonda Stephenson steal a couple of the scenes even though they have no lines. The grandmothers sit in one corner of the church with white lightening moonshine in hidden in in their laps making sure they aren't forgotten.

Denise Sanders, played by Sasha Bohon, is an actor who fits well into the Sanders family but doesn't play second fiddle to anyone on stage. She is the flirtatious Sanders daughter who at one point blurts out that she plans to work for the USO to take care of all the needs of the young fighting men. Her conservative Baptist mother, Vera Sanders, played by Lanette Six, whisks her to a corner for a scolding.

The pastor, Mervin Oglethorpe, played well by Caleb Whitman, doesn't let any scenes slip away without a timely straight-faced splash of humor that adds to the family atmosphere.

Christmas carols and church songs are part of the southern gospel music performed throughout the musical. The audience is invited to sing along with the cast on stage. This musical is never boring.

The pastor and the mother Vera Sanders, uses Bible scripture in a tasteful way to entertain the audience. The pastor and Vera are never at a loss to quote scripture as it pertains to some aspect of their daily lives.

The Sanders Family Christmas can be seen on Dec. 1-3, 8-10 and 15-17 at the Chief Theater on Park Ave. across from the Chiefland Police Station. Performances are at 7:30 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays and Sundays at 2 p.m.

People can voluntarily bring gifts for Toys for Tots. They will receive a discount on the purchase of a ticket for the play if they bring a toy.