Stage Manager’s Career Built Upon MSU Network

After graduating in Theatre from Michigan State University in March 1977, Ruth Kramer worked in various Michigan professional theatres from East Lansing to Coldwater and Detroit before moving in February 1978 to New York City, where she’s lived ever since.

Settling into a day job in Manhattan while working theatre positions at night, Kramer later was hired as a stage manager by Pilobolus Dance Theatre and toured with them for the next three years.

“Amazingly, I came right back here to campus with Pilobolus in 1981 and faced the MSU Auditorium space as stage manager,” Kramer recalled during a recent interview on the MSU Auditorium stage. “I still tell students how coming back to play on this stage made for a very satisfying experience.”

Kramer added that her career began with the people she met at MSU.

“My time at MSU gave me that beginning network,” she said. “My entire career branched out from the tree trunk of Michigan State University.”

Her MSU network helped land her first job out of college at Tibbits Summer Theatre in Coldwater, Michigan, where she was a stage manager. Three years later, her MSU and Tibbits contacts helped again in getting her a job at the Virginia Theatre, now the August Wilson Theatre.

Kramer advises students to start building their network of professional contacts as early as possible, keeping in mind that every job could lead to another down the road.

“My career is a perfect example of the crucial importance of networking,” she said. “For instance, I got my Equity card because a director I’d worked with at Tibbits Summer Theatre introduced me to someone who hired me as the stage manager for a 1983 off-Broadway show, From Brooks with Love. Since then, I’ve been all over this beautiful country working as a regional and stock stage manager, living a varied and rich life.”

Kramer returned to MSU’s campus in fall 2015 to be the guest stage manager in the Department of Theatre’s Guest Artists Series.

During her recent stay, she had the opportunity to meet and work with students and faculty in the Arts and Cultural Management program.

“That program is teaching students valuable skills, while giving those who may not intend to pursue a career as an artist options to build a career in a discipline they truly love,” she said.

As to what brings Kramer joy and makes her most proud, she says it’s her 18-year association with Pittsburgh Public Theater and her work with Actors’ Equity Association, the labor union representing American actors and stage managers in the theatre.

“I’m very proud and happy to be a highly active member of Actors’ Equity,” she said. “Since 1987-88, I’ve worked on committees learning as much as I can about my profession, and been elected three times to serve on the National Council. It’s highly satisfying for me to work toward the greater good of others. It helps make it great to get up in the morning.”