

BRIGHTLIGHTS



[Bekah Wachenfeld ('10)]

# Staging success

By Marissa Dennehy ('11)

Award-winning stage manager Bekah Wachenfeld ('10) is an apprentice at Walnut Street Theatre, the oldest and most subscribed theater company in the world.

**B**ekah Wachenfeld may work behind the scenes — literally backstage — but her work has taken her from the Kennedy Center to Walnut Street Theatre, a national historic landmark.

Wachenfeld ('10) is a stage management apprentice working on the 202nd season at Philadelphia's Walnut Street Theatre, the most subscribed theater company in the world with 56,000 annual subscribers. A theater and dance major, Wachenfeld served as stage manager for eight JMU theater and musical productions and earned national attention during her senior year. The United States Institute for Technology named her the 2010 National USITT Clearcom Student Stage Manager of the Year.

"I was absolutely thrilled. It was truly an honor," says Wachenfeld, who found her niche in stage management while in high school. "Stage management allows me to be a key part of the production and bring it to life," she says.

Richard Finkelstein, professor of stage design in the JMU School of Theater and Dance and an internationally renowned set designer, worked closely with Wachenfeld as an undergraduate. "The USITT top stage management award pits JMU

students against powerhouse M.F.A. stage management students from the likes of Yale, Carnegie-Mellon, N.Y.U., the University of Cincinnati, etc.," he says. "Each discipline in the broad range of design and technical theater is represented — including lighting; technical direction; and costume, makeup and scenery design."

Wachenfeld credits her success to the "hands-on learning environment" at JMU. "Professors in the theater department are supportive and talented, and they share their talents with students." She also values the experience of working with and learning from her peers. "The JMU student body is a fortress of inspiration. I learned how the theater runs by working side by side with many of my peers."

And her peers value Wachenfeld. As a junior she was one of eight national winners in the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival, where she was also rec-

ognized for stage management. Finkelstein nominated her for the regional award, and she won first place and then competed for the national award for her work on the JMU production of *Twelfth Night*. As a national winner, Wachenfeld spent a week at the Kennedy Center working with the theater technical crew. "I learned how to breathe along with the actor during a performance to know exactly when the right moment is to change a light or a sound cue," Wachenfeld says.

JMU also knows how to recognize talent. As an undergraduate, Wachenfeld received a School of Theatre and Dance scholarship, the Stratford Players Scholarship and the Snyder Fund Award. As a senior she received the Phillip S. Grayson Award for Achievement in Technical Theater.

At the Walnut Street Theatre Wachenfeld performs the duties of an assistant stage manager. She works with a production from the beginning of the rehearsal process, tracking props and scenery pieces, to helping bring the director's vision to life. She works with N.Y.C. and Philadelphia actors and enjoys the problem-solving process during productions. "I enjoy overcoming any challenges that arise," she says. **HL**

\* Learn more at [www.walnutstreettheatre.org/](http://www.walnutstreettheatre.org/).

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