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## ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

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**Some murderous fun has come to town**  
**Orlando's MurderWatch Mystery Theatre bring their crime-solving show to the Garden Eatery at the Beach**

**ANDREW KENNETH GAY**  
*Record Correspondent*

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Murder and mayhem is the main course at the Mystery Dinner Theatre at the Garden Eatery.  
By [RALPH D. PRIDDY](#), Staff

There's a new act on the beach that wants to kill you with comedy.

The act is called MurderWatch Mystery Theatre, a dinner theater comedy show put on by Dreamland Productions of Orlando and hosted every Sunday at 2 p.m. by the Garden Eatery at 4320 A1A South.

For \$24.95, guests are treated to dinner, dessert, and a death or two, in an interactive murder-mystery show in which diners compete to solve a crime and win a prize.

"We really enjoyed it," says Martha Drabiski of Coquina Crossing. She solved the case one week and won a handcuff-shaped watch and an audiobook mystery. "It's good clean entertainment with a lot of interaction. I had a lot of fun."

Interaction is the slogan of MurderWatch -- "A show where the audience gets caught in the act." Actors sit in the audience. Evidence is planted on audience members. Guests are often asked questions, brought up on stage and become part of the plot.

In the area of weekend entertainment, St. Augustine "is ripe for something different," says Jeffrey Gay, who created and owns Dreamland Productions and MurderWatch with his wife Connie J. Gay. "It's a great place. We just

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A cast member performs during the show.  
By **RALPH D. PRIDDY**, Staff

think it's a tremendous city, and when we came here about four years ago, we instantly had chemistry with the town."

Jeff and Connie, originally of Salem, Mass., first created MurderWatch 14 years ago for the Grosvenor Resort at Walt Disney World.

Says Connie: " When we first moved to Orlando, they said, 'Oh, you'll never be a non-Disney company working on Disney property. It will

never happen.' My husband walked into the Grosvenor Resort -- it had a mystery theme to it -- and he walked into their sales department and said, 'Listen. Someone has to meet with me, because your hotel is the sentence, and I have the exclamation point.' That was the line that got him into the sales meeting."

Since then, say Connie and Jeff, they have put on their show every Saturday at the Grosvenor, and the FBI has rated MurderWatch the number-one murder-mystery show in the country. Members of the Mystery Writers of America guild, together they write the scripts for each show, and Connie directs while Jeff produces.

For the St. Augustine show at the Garden Eatery, "We are building a complete St. Augustine core of performers," Jeff says. "We're currently still bringing a few folks in from Orlando, but our goal is to create here what we created in Orlando."

Jeff and Connie say that some members of their cast have been with their company all fourteen years.

One actor who has been with Dreamland Productions for 12 years is Ron Segall, a Jacksonville resident and sales representative for a company that sells health care software. Segall previously lived in Orlando, but now he commutes weekends to both the Orlando and St. Augustine shows. He recently celebrated his 50th birthday while performing MurderWatch in St. Augustine.

"It's a lot of fun," he says. "The audiences change every week, so it's always new. It's always interesting, and it's always a challenge because I play multiple parts."

One of the new St. Augustine core actors, Robert Gill, says that playing MurderWatch is rewarding because it has "a lot of free-form, ad-lib, spur of the moment stuff. It gives you that improvisational feeling that most actors like to do. It gives you a different show every time."



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Cast members of the Orlando-based Murder Mystery Theater perform at the Garden Eatery.  
By **RALPH D. PRIDDY**, Staff

### April Calendar of Events

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	<b>15</b>	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			

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Palatka actress Debbie Braunck agrees, saying, "They gave us the script and told us that it would evolve as you learned the role, which is certainly true."



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Emily Hunter, 7, participates in the mystery theater as young assistant Shortlock Holmes.

By [RALPH D. PRIDDY](#), Staff

Connie Gay calls this process "the layering of the script," and her husband attributes it to the actors' sense of emotional ownership.

That feeling of emotional ownership extends to the women behind the Garden Eatery. Co-owners Elayne Haines and Jewell Melton -- best-friends for thirty-three years -- say they love MurderWatch and could not be happier with its results.

According to Haines, MurderWatch has changed her business "greatly.

It made it a lot of fun. ... every time you think about it, it makes you grin. It stays with you. It's a fun experience."

She and Melton say they hope to expand in the future and turn their restaurant into a seven-night a week dinner theater.

"When we met Elayne, it just clicked," says Connie. "We're very spoiled by Disney resort chefs preparing the meals that coincide with our show. We have a great show product that we're very proud of and that we give great care about, and we wanted someone to give that care to the food. So we tried different restaurants in St. Augustine -- some were good, and some were bad. For various reasons there just wasn't a fit."

Jeff agrees and says that they chose the Garden Eatery because of its excellent food and because the owners "shared the vision of what it could be."

Says Haines: "Our vision is possibly downtown in a larger place."

For now, MurderWatch can be found at the Garden Eatery every Sunday, 2 p.m., at 4320 A1A South. Reservations required. Call 471-2691.

In addition to MurderWatch, Dreamland also puts on a Tuesday night interactive comedy show from 6 to 9 at the Garden Eatery called Game Show Mania, where guests become contestants on their favorite game shows. Admission is \$5 plus the price of the meal.

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