

Being a success in business but still being a failure

Annual production explores the conflict between business ethics and personal morality

What happens when a good business decision is a bad moral decision? Is it possible to be a successful business person and still hold fast to your principles?

In an age when corporate scandal and corruption regularly make the headlines, Smithville Christian High School's annual mainstage production, *Radium Girls*, explores a true-life catastrophe that forces a factory owner to confront a moral dilemma.

"It's very much like any of those stories in the news where business ethics and personal morality come into conflict with each other," said director and drama teacher Gord Park.

Park said he chose the play, which is based on a true story, because he thought the "tough decisions" being made in the play "were really interesting."

"History seems to be loaded with examples where something that we thought was the best thing ever is the very thing that is killing us," he said. "This is a story where somebody realizes what they are doing is causing harm, but legally, they don't have to do anything about it. That's where the personal morality is."

Based on events that happened in Orange, New Jersey during the Second World War, *Radium Girls* features the young women hired by the US Radium Corporation to paint luminous dials on watches and other equipment, mostly for the military. Instructed by their supervisors to lick the paint brushes to sharpen the points, the girls begin to get sick. As the factory workers are slowly poisoned, the corporation denies responsibility and even blames the women for "contributory negligence."

"The question explored by the play is can we trust big business?" Park said. "What hooked me is the person who takes over the company is a Christian guy and there's this great scene where his wife reminds him you can do as much good for people in the boardroom as you can in the pulpit."

The lawsuit launched by the workers, who came to be known as the Radium Girls, attracted international attention, and changed workers' rights in North America, contributing to modern labour laws.

"At the end of the story, and I don't want to give the ending away, the business leader carries a burden with him for the rest of his life," Park said. "He's a compassionate guy, but he's totally stuck. I think the lesson is that there is nothing that is worth sacrificing human compassion for."

Radium Girls: May 7, 8, 13, 14 & 15. All performances begin at 8 pm, and tickets are \$12.50 in advance, and \$15 at the door. Tickets can be purchased at the school, at 905-957-3255 or sdoffice@sdch.on.ca.

– *By Marlene Bergsma. Director of Communications and Admissions*