

CATF At 25: On Clover Road

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Editor's Note: Every Sunday, The Journal will preview one of the five plays featured in the 2015 Contemporary American Theater Festival in Shepherdstown. The CATF runs from July 10 to Aug. 2, with previews held July 5-9.

SHEPHERDSTOWN — Ed Herendeen has fashioned the Contemporary American Theater Festival as a place where audience members leave asking important questions — both to others and of themselves.

“Contemporary theater tends to ask more questions than it provides answers,” Herendeen said during an interview Tuesday. “Our understanding is that contemporary theater provides a forum for a living conversation to take place after the contemporary audience has had the experience to witness, see and hear a live new play.”

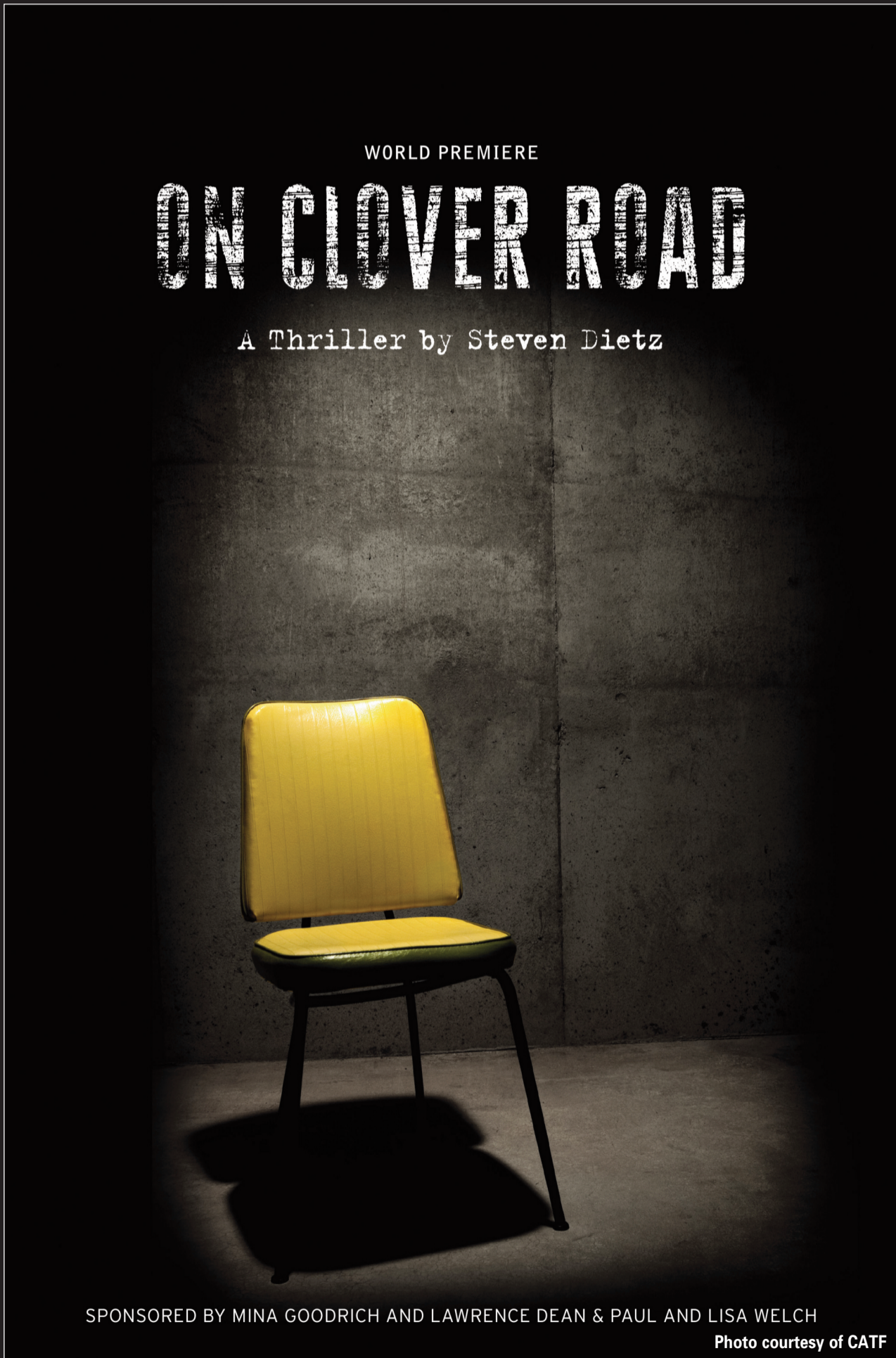
As the founder and producing director of the festival, Herendeen is kicking off its 25th edition with five new plays — including four world premieres — that feature an array of themes relevant to society in America today, he said.

Herendeen is directing two of the plays, one of which is “On Clover Road.” The thriller is written in the classic noir style, Herendeen said.

“More importantly, ‘On Clover Road’ is a world premiere by one of our returning playwrights, Steven Dietz, and this will be the third play that Steven and I have collaborated on at the Contemporary American Theater Festival,” he said.

“Steven has set the play in an abandoned motel on a lonely American road, which already sets up that noir setting. In many ways, you could describe the play as a reunion play between a mother and her estranged daughter,” he said.

The premise of the play circles around a mother, Kate, whose daughter Jessie has run away from home and joined a religious cult. She hires a private investigator, Stine, to find Jessie and get her away from the cult. He’s also tasked with deprogram-



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Photo courtesy of CATF

ming her so she can return home with Kate, which is “easier said than done,” Herendeen said.

“In many ways, the play is set in hell — as a

metaphor,” Herendeen said. “Like any classic thriller, the plot has many twists and turns.

“My hope is that we will create a terrifying world

because for the past four years, Kate’s daughter has been influenced — maybe brainwashed — into being a member of this religious cult. But Kate is a fierce

fighter, and she will do anything to get her daughter back,” Herendeen said.

At some point, the audience will be introduced to Harris McClain, the leader

of the aforementioned religious cult.

“He is a charismatic, charming and frightening human being,” Herendeen said of the character, played by Tom Coiner.

Lee Sellars plays Stine, and Tasha Lawrence plays Kate.

“We’re thrilled that Lee Sellars, who has performed at the CATF for several years, is returning to create the role of Stine,” Herendeen said.

The show runs for 120 minutes.

Herendeen said that he doesn’t look for particular themes when choosing what will eventually become the CATF’s lineup. It’s more of a connective experience for him, he said.

“We don’t look for a theme. I’m interested in finding the best plays, and the plays I connect with both emotionally and intellectually,” Herendeen said. “Plays that are presenting issues, events, stories that are relevant and reflect and mirror today’s society. I’m looking for plays that move me emotionally, that hit me in the gut. I’m looking for plays that I believe have something to say about the world that we live in. Plays that are entertaining, but more importantly, plays that are provocative and serious and that will make us think.

“One of the most difficult things for a playwright to have is a first production of a play, because many theaters in their season may only do one play,” Herendeen said. “But the Contemporary American Theater Festival is dedicated to the American playwright. Our mission is really specific. We are dedicated to producing and developing new American theater — that’s who we are and what we do.”

According to CATF.org, Dietz’s 30-plus plays and adaptations have been produced in regional theaters and have been seen in places all over the world, such as England, Japan, Germany, France, Australia, Sweden, Austria, Russia, Slovenia, Argentina, Peru, Greece, Singapore, South Korea and South Africa.

“On Clover Road” debuts Friday, July 10, at 8 p.m. at the Frank Center Theater.