



## **PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **NSSRA's Bright Star Theatre Company Presents Professional Production, "I, Phone," in Partnership with Northbrook Park District**

**Northbrook – March 3, 2020** – Actors in the Northbrook-based Bright Star Theatre Company (BSTC) are hard at work preparing for their upcoming March performances of this year's professional production of "I, Phone." Starring 10 actors with disabilities and their volunteer Creative Companions, rehearsals began in September.

"I, Phone" is an original musical written by Northbrook natives Julie Gibson Lay, also the show's director, and Joan Matthews. Set in the 22<sup>nd</sup> century, the show explores a future society where smartphones run the world and everyone in it. Humans are reduced to charging stations, wearing solar chargers on their heads to keep their phones "in charge." One day it begins to rain, causing the solar chargers to stop working and the phones die, leaving humans to struggle to communicate without the benefit of technology. The fun unfolds as humans struggle to learn to communicate face-to-face for the first time, and discover they are never too young to learn old tricks.

In its ninth year, Bright Star Theatre Company is a program produced by Northern Suburban Special Recreation Association (NSSRA) in partnership with Northbrook Park District. Meeting weekly from September to March, the experience combines theater games, movement exercises and musical training for participants ages 16 and up who work with Northbrook Park District theatre staff to put on a professional production.

This is the second year that Gibson Lay and Matthews have created a script for BSTC together. After several years of licensing popular shows, director Julie Gibson Lay decided it was time to pen a show of her own with BSTC cast members in mind. The result was a fun and witty show, "THE HIVE," about a beehive rocked by change.

"We had so much fun brainstorming, writing, composing and designing last year that we decided to do it again this year," said Gibson Lay. Gibson Lay and Matthews, who last year enlisted the help of their families, again benefitted from their collective expertise to create a new and unique script for actors with special needs.

Matthews, who has an adult child with autism and is familiar with the special-needs community, recruited her daughter Julia, a senior at Glenbrook North High School, to create the "I, Phone" logo while Gibson Lay's husband, Chris, a professional musician, and son Cecil, an aspiring film director and composer, wrote the original score and songs.

The result is "I, Phone," is a comedy set in a future world with a message for today.

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“Together we worked to create something new and unique for actors with special needs, a platform to showcase what they are capable of and an opportunity to stand on stage in front of family, friends and community and receive acclaim for their talent and hard work,” said Gibson Lay. “Bright Star is all about what special-needs actors can do, not what they can’t do. They just need to be given the opportunity.”

Gibson Lay also brought on a new creative to this year’s team of talent in choreographer Graham Kostic of Barrington. “It’s an honor to work with a company that provides individuals with special needs the space to explore and express themselves,” said Kostic. “Watching the cast interpret the choreography is a beautiful thing. It’s in these unadulterated moments that you can vividly see the transformative and empowering impact of theater.”

Pennie Lome, a student at Glenbrook North High School, has been a Creative Companion with BSTC for six years. “My favorite part of the show this year is seeing how excited and energetic participants are on stage,” said Lome. She continued, “I have been doing theatre since fourth grade and this program combines my two passions: theater and working with participants with special needs. It has been so fun and rewarding.”

Performances will take place at Northbrook Theatre on Saturday, March 14 at 5:00 pm and Sunday, March 15 at 1:00 pm. Tickets are on sale at [www.nbparks.org](http://www.nbparks.org) and at the Northbrook Leisure Center Box Office.

## **SHOW SYNOPSIS**

It’s the 22nd century. Modern technology no longer requires human input. Cell phones run the world and humans have been turned into portable solar charging stations. Then one day, it rains and rains, and the phones stop working. Watch the fun unfold as humans struggle to learn how to communicate without electronics and discover that they are never too young to learn old tricks. An original musical written for the members of Bright Star Theatre Company, “I, Phone” will make you laugh, make you cry, and make you happy to be alive.

## **TICKETS**

Available online at [www.nbparks.org](http://www.nbparks.org) and the Northbrook Leisure Center Box Office.

## **REHEARSALS**

Tuesdays, 4:30 – 5:30 pm • Northbrook Theatre

## **DRESS REHEARSALS**

Tuesday, March 10, 4:30 – 6:30 pm • Northbrook Theatre

Thursday, March 11, 4:30 – 6:30 pm • Northbrook Theatre

Friday, March 13, 4:30 – 6:30 pm • Northbrook Theatre

## **PERFORMANCES**

Saturday, March 14, 5:00 pm • Northbrook Theatre

Sunday, March 15, 1:00 pm • Northbrook Theatre

**CAST** (Click here for in-depth interviews: <https://www.nssra.org/media/features/bstc-meet-the-cast-2020/>)

Katie Baeckelandt (Glenview) as **Virginia Mobile**

Callan Cox (Deerfield) as **Ma Belle**

Kathleen Dreger (Highland Park) as **Ann Droid**

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## **CAST, CONTINUED**

Emmett Fox (Wilmette) as **Sam Sung**

Maggie Johnson (Glenview) as **Gal X E**

Lisa Krupinski (Glenview) as **Eleanor Gleason (Elle G)**

Deane O'Connor (Evanston) as **Mike Rosoft**

Aarav Saraiya (Northbrook) as **Kyo Cera**

Jay Slotnick (Northbrook) as **Mr. Theodore Noble III (T Noble)**

Jacob Stasieluk (Northbrook) as **Moe Torolla**

## **Photo IDs**

#1: The cast of Bright Star Theatre Company. Top row, L-R: Lindsey Agan (Companion, Northbrook), Alyssa Goldstein (Companion, Riverwoods), Jay Slotnick (Northbrook), Allie Daniels (Companion, Northbrook), Lisa Krupinski (Glenview), Deane O'Connor (Evanston), Sophie Pasma (Companion, Northbrook), Evan Kwiatkowski (Companion, Northbrook), Aarav Saraiya (Northbrook), Nora Risinger (Companion, Northbrook), Kathleen Dreger (Highland Park), Jacob Stasieluk (Northbrook), Maggie Johnson (Glenview) and Sarah Steinway (Companion, Deerfield). Bottom row, L-R: Marlee Fradin (Companion, Deerfield), Callan Cox (Deerfield), Shannon Graham (Companion, Deerfield) and Emmett Fox (Wilmette).

#2 and #3: Choreographer Graham Kostic (Barrington) works with participants Aarav Saraiya (center, Northbrook) and Emmett Fox (right, Wilmette) along with companion Evan Kwiatkoski (left, Northbrook) at a recent rehearsal at the Northbrook Leisure Center. Saraiya plays Kkyo Cera and Fox plays Sam Sung in the company's upcoming March performances of "I, Phone."

#4: Companion Allie Daniels (Northbrook) with cast member Lisa Krupinski (Glenview).

#5: Actor Kathleen Dreger (Highland Park) works on choreography with companion Nora Risinger (Northbrook) at a recent rehearsal for the upcoming Bright Start Theatre Company performances of "I, Phone."

#6: Cast members Deane O'Connor (left, Evanston) and Jay Slotnick (right, Northbrook) work with companion Alyssa Goldstein on acting exercises. O'Connor plays Mike Rosoft and Slotnick plays Mr. Theodore Noble III (T. Noble) in the company's upcoming performances of "I, Phone."

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NSSRA provides and facilitates year-round recreation programs and services for children, teens and adults with disabilities who live in the partner communities. NSSRA is an extension of ten park districts, two cities and one village in the northern suburbs of Chicago. This partnership includes the Park Districts of Deerfield, Glencoe, Glenview, Highland Park, Kenilworth, Lake Bluff, Northbrook, Northfield, Wilmette and Winnetka; the Cities of Highwood and Lake Forest; and the Village of Riverwoods. NSSRA has been creating an environment of belonging through play since 1970, this year celebrating 50 years, and has the distinction as the first Special Recreation Association in the country. For more information about NSSRA and the programs and services it provides, visit [www.nssra.org](http://www.nssra.org).