

# Becky Gulsvig tickled pink to play Elle; 'Legally Blonde' visits Oklahoma City

By Rick Rogers, The Oklahoman, Oklahoma City

Jan. 10--It doesn't take Becky Gulsvig long to transform herself into Elle Woods, the character she portrays in "Legally Blonde: The Musical." The petite, blond actress applies her makeup, steps into one of her many pink costumes, grabs her Chihuahua, Bruiser, and waits for her entrance.

It's a process she's streamlined during her nearly four years with the show, a musical based on the 2001 MGM film of the same name. Gulsvig participated in an early workshop of "Legally Blonde" in 2006. In April 2007, the Minnesota native joined the cast of the Broadway production as a member of the ensemble.

Gulsvig eventually became Laura Bell Bundy's understudy and ended up going on as Elle about 50 times. When the first national tour of "Legally Blonde" was launched in September 2008, Gulsvig stepped into the role of Elle permanently. The production comes to Oklahoma City this week for eight performances at Civic Center Music Hall.

Elle is a typical Southern California valley girl who loves to shop, is a proud member of her school's Delta Nu sorority and is convinced her boyfriend is about to propose marriage. She's devastated when he breaks up with her and after wallowing in self-pity, she decides to follow him to Harvard.

"I can certainly relate to Elle's situation, because as a young woman you constantly have to prove yourself," Gulsvig said recently. "I feel I've been able to channel those feelings into this role. I'm someone who tries to play it safe, but I've learned that I have to push myself as well. You learn where your limits are, vocally and physically."

Gulsvig said that while Elle and the Chihuahua attract legions of young girls to "Legally Blonde," the brothers, dads and boyfriends who get dragged along have just as good a time. She attributes that to the show's underlying message.

"The story is all about being true to yourself," Gulsvig said. "That's not a simple thing to do or to believe in. And while 'Legally Blonde' does give people a chance to escape, laugh and have a good time, to have that message in such a fun package is really great."

When Gulsvig signed on to portray Elle in the "Legally Blonde" tour, she also joined an exclusive group of performers who have had the good fortune to share the stage with a lovable dog. Among the musical theater's most famous scene stealers are Chowsie in "Gypsy," Sandy in "Annie" and Toto in "The Wizard of Oz."

"Any time there's an animal on stage, you have to build a sense of trust," Gulsvig said. "It's really just about bonding with them, playing with them, giving them treats and do obedience training with them. It takes a little bit of time, but it's quite easy when you love dogs as much as I do."

"Just as the main characters have understudies, so does the dog. We've had a couple of instances when the main Bruiser didn't feel well, so the other dog would go on. In one outdoor theater we played, the main bulldog was afraid of the fireworks that were going off, so just to be safe, they put the other bulldog in."

Prior to being cast in "Legally Blonde," Gulsvig starred as Amber Von Tussle in "Hairspray" and as Wendy in "Peter Pan." But Elle remains one of the most satisfying roles she's tackled. As Gulsvig notes in her program bio, she's "tickled pink" to be a part of the "Legally Blonde" cast.

"There are people who think 'Legally Blonde' is fluffy and silly, but it's much more than that," Gulsvig said. "It's the heart of story that people ultimately relate to -- being true to yourself never goes out of style."