



Left to right, the cast of Mountain Community Theater's production of "Rumors": Kathryn Cunningham as Cookie, David Leach as Ernie, Daria Troxell as Claire, Noah Bunting-Syren as Officer Welch, James Stewart as Officer Pudney, Kip Allert as Lenny, Sarah Marsh as Chris, Kyle Wood as Ken, Steve Macramalla as Glenn and Babe Payne as Cassie. Credit: Lyle Troxell

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

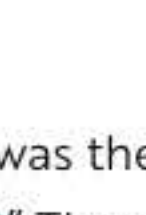
Mountain Community Theater's 'Rumors' turns a cocktail party into comic chaos



BY JANA MARCUS

September 22, 2026

[Gift this article](#)



Mountain Community Theater serves up Neil Simon's "Rumors" at full comic speed, with a tight ensemble, precise direction by MarNae Taylor and standout comic turns from the cast. It's a cocktail party gone spectacularly wrong, and great fun to watch.

Local theatergoers have been to some pretty disastrous cocktail parties this year.

There was the alcohol-soaked evening from hell in "[Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?](#)" Then came Noël Coward's "[Private Lives](#)," where cocktails, old lovers, and spectacularly bad judgment proved to be a combustible combination.

Now, Mountain Community Theater has invited us to another party.

And once again, things do not go according to plan.

If you go

Who: Mountain Community Theater

What: Neil Simon's "Rumors"

When: Through Oct. 11

Where: Park Hall, 9400 Mill St., Ben Lomond

Tickets: [Click here](#)

Neil Simon's "Rumors" begins as an elegant 10th anniversary celebration and rapidly deteriorates into a gunshot, a missing wife, marital suspicions, physical injuries, frantic cover-ups and enough lies to make everyone in the room forget what the truth was in the first place.

It is also very, very funny.

The first guests to arrive at the home of Charlie Brock, deputy mayor of New York City, and his wife, Myra, are attorney Ken Gorman (Kyle Wood) and his wife, Chris (Sarah Marsh). Instead of finding cocktails and canapés, they discover Charlie upstairs with a gunshot wound to his earlobe, Myra nowhere to be found, and the household staff mysteriously absent.

Naturally, the sensible thing would be to call the police.

That would also make for a very short play.

Instead, Ken and Chris begin scheming about how to cover up whatever has happened to their host. Charlie is a prominent public figure, after all, and they must avoid scandal.

Then the doorbell rings.

Enter Lenny and Claire Ganz (Kip Allert and Daria Troxell). Then Cookie and Ernie Cusack (Kathryn Cunningham and David Leach). Then Cassie and Glenn Cooper (Babe Payne and Steven Macramalla).

With every new arrival, the explanation changes. One lie requires another, which requires another, until nobody seems entirely certain what they are covering up anymore.

Simon wrote "Rumors" in the late 1980s as his first full-length farce, a change of direction after the more autobiographical plays in his Eugene trilogy: "Brighton Beach Memoirs," "Biloxi Blues," and "Broadway Bound." The play premiered at San Diego's Old Globe before moving to Broadway in 1988, where it ran for more than 500 performances.

No Felix Unger or Oscar Madison here, no central character around whom everything revolves. Instead, Simon built a comic machine: 10 characters, one increasingly ridiculous predicament and a series of misunderstandings that have to land with almost mathematical precision.

Farce looks easy when it works.

It isn't.

Slow down the dialogue and the jokes die. Miss an entrance and the rhythm collapses. Telegraph a punchline and the audience gets there before you do.

Director MarNae Taylor understands this well. She keeps the evening moving at a brisk pace, with a sharp eye for the details that make this kind of comedy work. Doors open when they should. Reactions land where they should.

Conversations overlap without becoming muddy.

Daria Troxell and Kip Allert are especially good at this as Claire and Lenny Ganz. Troxell has terrific comic instincts. A look, a pause or the slightest shift in expression tells us exactly what Claire is thinking before she says a word.

Allert matches her beautifully as Lenny, who arrives already battered from a car accident and becomes increasingly exasperated by the insanity around him. His timing is spot-on, and the more frustrated Lenny becomes, the funnier he gets.

Together, Troxell and Allert have the easy rhythm of two actors who understand that comic timing isn't just about when to speak.

Sometimes it's knowing exactly when not to.

Marsh and Wood set the whole ridiculous enterprise in motion as Chris and Ken. As the first guests through the door, they are also the first forced to decide what on earth to do about Charlie. Their frantic attempt to protect their host creates the lie that everyone else will spend the evening trying to keep alive, and they do it with plenty of physical comedy.

Kathryn Cunningham as Cookie Cusack arrives with a back that keeps spasming. Her husband, Ernie, played by David Leach, burns his fingers so badly trying to make dinner that he spends much of the evening with his hands wrapped like a mummy.

Cunningham also gets one of the evening's wonderfully daffy bits of logic when Cookie realizes the men's names all have a certain rhythm while the women's names begin with "C." Surely that must mean something.

It doesn't.

But by this point, why shouldn't it?

Babe Payne has great flair as Cassie Cooper, the pouty blonde bombshell convinced her husband, Glenn, is cheating on her.

The only problem is figuring out with whom.

Names and suspicions start flying around the room, leaving Steven Macramalla's Glenn to navigate his wife's accusations and an evening in which every new piece of information seems to make things worse.

By the time all four couples are assembled, Taylor has created a wonderfully wonky ecosystem of misunderstandings, suspicions, gossip and outright falsehoods.

Nobody knows exactly what happened.

That doesn't stop anyone from having an opinion.

A scrap of information becomes a theory. Someone repeats it. Someone else embellishes it. Soon everyone is reacting to something that may not be remotely true.

Sound familiar?

Simon doesn't linger on any of that, of course. He has another door to open and another complication waiting behind it.

Eventually, the police arrive. Noah Bunting-Syren's Officer Welch and James Stewart's Officer Pudney walk into a house filled with people who have spent the evening lying to one another and are suddenly expected to produce a single coherent explanation.

Good luck with that.

By then, the production is running at full comic speed, and Allert gets the evening's biggest burst of applause as Lenny launches into a wildly elaborate reenactment for the police, spinning the night's tangled lies into one breathless piece of comic storytelling.

The visual world surrounding all this chaos is tasteful.

Taylor also designed the handsome, bright interior set, constructed by Mark Hoagland, with colorful accents that give the room plenty of personality without competing with the action. Donya Derakshandeh's costumes complement it beautifully, while Lyndsey Gould's clean lighting keeps the playing space crisp and inviting.

I particularly appreciate the smaller details. Blood appears on shirts and handkerchiefs. A burned hand is appropriately red. Stage cigarettes actually give off smoke. Glasses contain actual drinks, though presumably nothing alcoholic.

None of this is essential to getting the next laugh. But together, those details give the silliness a physical reality that makes the whole thing work better.

In a play built almost entirely on things that aren't true, Taylor makes sure the world surrounding them feels real.

And perhaps that is why "Rumors" remains so much fun. Underneath the gunshots, slammed doors, injuries and elaborate lies are recognizable people desperately trying to maintain the appearance that everything is perfectly fine.

It very clearly is not.

Mountain Community Theater's cast knows exactly how much fun it is to watch that facade collapse. Taylor keeps tightening the screws, the actors keep raising the stakes, and Simon keeps finding another way to make an already ridiculous situation even worse.

It's silly fun that invites us right into the room.

After "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?," "Private Lives," and now "Rumors," perhaps we have learned something important from the theater this year.

The next time someone invites you to a cocktail party, be very careful.