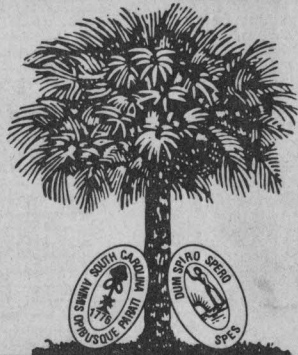


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LOCAL NEWS

Atwater play premiere stirs controversy

By **DOTTIE ASHLEY**
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The University of South Carolina's decision to turn down a chance to premiere a play about the late Lee Atwater, former chairman of the Republican National Committee, has caused a flurry of controversy in the Columbia arts community.

"Fixin' To Die: A Visit to the Mind of Lee Atwater," starring Los Angeles actor Bruce McIntosh, opens tonight at the College of Charleston for a run through Sunday. Written by Atlanta native Robert Myers, it will be directed by Tony Award-winner George Furth.

Los Angeles producer Beegie Truesdale,

formerly of South Carolina, said she first contacted USC in January about staging the play after she saw it in L.A., where it was performed for two months last fall.

Ms. Truesdale talked with several theaters in Columbia, but the only feasible one was USC's Longstreet Theatre. Meanwhile, she also contacted the College of Charleston about staging the play, following the Columbia opening.

"I had thought it would be good to do it first in Columbia since that was where Lee had lived, and then to bring it down to Charleston," said Ms. Truesdale. "When USC kept on delaying letting me know, one way or another, then I decided to open it at the college because they showed the most inter-

est."

Keith Davis, acting dean of USC's College of Humanities and Social Sciences, had said in an earlier news report, "With Lee as an alum and as a person in whose name the university has raised money, it would not be a wise thing for the university to be endorsing a fairly negative interpretation of Lee Atwater."

Atwater, who died of a brain tumor in 1991, received his undergraduate degree from Newberry College and his master's de-



Atwater

gree from USC.

Russell "Chip" McKinney, director of public affairs for USC, said, "The decision not to do the play never came to the president's (John Palms) office. It was left up to Keith Davis." Davis was out of his office Tuesday and could not be reached for comment.

"Fixin' To Die: A Visit to the Mind of Lee Atwater," tells of Atwater's rise to power as an adviser to George Bush's 1988 campaign, and how, at the end of his life, he apologized to those he felt he had hurt.

Allen Lyndrup, chairman of the College of Charleston's theater department, said, "We want to bring in interesting and challenging and even controversial theater to Charleston."