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Levittown's Lou Volpe, inspiration for NBC's 'Rise,' will be honored this weekend at Bucks County Playhouse

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TOM GRALISH

Truman High drama teacher Lou Volpe (right) rehearses "Spring Awakening" with his student actors in 2011. Michael Sokolove's book "Drama High" was about that season, and has been adapted for the fictional TV series "Rise."



by **John Timpane**, Staff Writer [@jtimpane](#) | jt@phillynews.com

Lou Volpe, whose 44 years as a drama teacher at Harry S. Truman High School in Levittown have brought him fame as the inspiration for the book *Drama High* and the TV series *Rise*, [is being inducted into the Bucks County Playhouse Hall of Fame on Saturday.](#)

It's part of a gala weekend celebrating Volpe and his career. "When you think of the lives that such a person changes, it seemed like a great idea to induct a theater teacher into the hall," said Alex Fraser, producing director of the playhouse.

"I am so honored," Volpe said by phone from his home in Yardley. "When they told me the people who are in there, like Angela Lansbury, Oscar Hammerstein, and Shirley Jones, it hit me, 'Wow, what an incredible place.' "

The TV series' A-list executive producers, writer [Jason Katims](#) (*Friday Night Lights*) and theatrical producer [Jeffrey Seller](#) (*Hamilton*) will both be on hand for the festivities on Saturday, along with co-producer Flody Suarez and *Drama High* author Michael Sokolove.

The event, open to the public, starts at 4 p.m. Saturday at the Bucks County Playhouse and is scheduled to include performances by former students and a screening of the debut episode of *Rise*. The event is free, but tickets must be reserved.

Volpe retired from teaching in May 2013, but he still keeps his hand in the game. He spent all day Monday at the [50th anniversary Student Theater Festival at Bucks County Playhouse](#), holding workshops and judging student plays.

"Yesterday, teaching those workshops, it was glorious," Volpe said Tuesday. "I felt like I was right back teaching again. You really never lose it. As soon as I got up to do the workshop, I felt like I was home again.

"And the kids had a wonderful time," he said. "And that's the whole point."

Rise has been criticized by some for "straightwashing" the character Lou Mazzuchelli (Josh Radnor), the drama teacher in the show. Mazzuchelli is a straight, married man with three kids, whereas Volpe is gay. But the difference between the character and himself is fine by Volpe, he said.

Writer Katims "told me right at the start that 'This will be a TV show inspired by the book, but not based on the book,' " Volpe said.

“I totally trust what Jason is doing because he has always done such quality work. And the main character doesn’t have to be any particular thing. He just has to teach drama, and the students have to be students.”

Hall of Fame induction, 4 p.m. Saturday, April 14, Bucks County Playhouse, 70 S. Main St., New Hope. Free; tickets must be reserved. Information: 215-862-2121 or bcptheater.org