

spotlight

November/December 2017 \$3.00

american association of community theatre

**AACT
NewPlayFest**

**Community Theatre
Management
Conference**

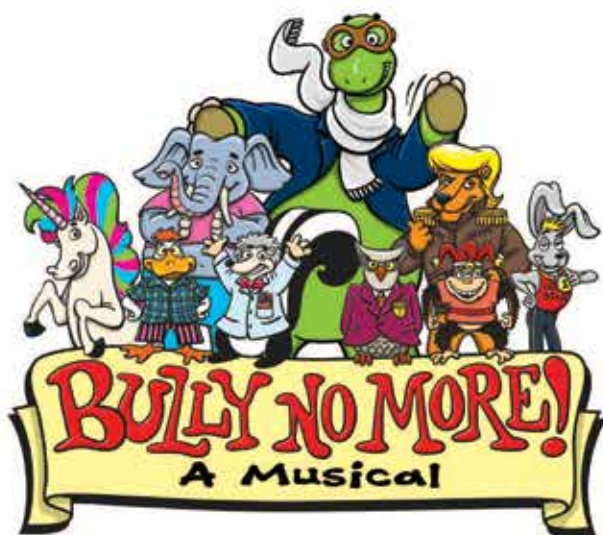
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Carole Ries
AACT President
2017 - 2019

A GIFT: GIVEN AND RECEIVED

Most of us are well into our 2017-2018 season. We are, in fact, approaching the holidays, so I've been thinking of the impact of gifts - those we give and those we receive.

Why do you do community theatre? What do you get in exchange for giving so much of your time, talent, and treasure? In exchange for your time, you become part of a huge family that cares about you and counts you as a friend. You have a reason to get up in the morning and go help out in the box office, costume shop, scene shop, usher, or scour the antique shops and flea markets for treasures to dress the set or create fabulous props. You have reason to be proud when you see the final product that would not be what it is without your vital contribution.

Whenever you share your gift of talent, you come alive in a way we seldom experience. When you are able to use your creative forces, you are able to touch your own core. Today we hear a lot of talk about 'living in the moment' and mindfulness. The experience of performing is clearly an opportunity to completely immerse in a role or a task. It is experienced as pure joy, as well as a little healthy pain - for seldom do we experience growth without it. An audience brings the finishing touch, the moment when actor and crew literally exchange molecules with

the folks who come to be entertained and inspired.

In exchange for your treasure, you know that you are instrumental in securing the future of an institution that means so much to you and your community.

A community theatre gives so much to you, but what does it receive in return? You, the volunteer, are its heart, soul, and backbone. Without your strength, the theatre would limp along, wondering how it can pay the bills, mount the next production, cast the next show, or attract the audiences it needs to survive.

And finally, the biggest gift of all is to your community. You and your theatre help to build your community. You transform it as you and your theatre thrive. You are major economic and artistic drivers in your city or town. You provide jobs, draw audiences from nearby communities, and purchase goods and services. Your impact is seldom fully understood and appreciated. Be proud of yourselves and share the joy at this time of year when we show gratitude for all that we give and receive.

Carole Ries



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On the Cover

Wizzer (Gail Janssen) gets a kiss from Minnie (Melissa Auvil) in the AACT NewPlayFest world premiere production of *Finishing School* by Elaine Liner at Elkhart Civic Theatre in Bristol, Indiana
photo by Mel Moore

Contacting AACT

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AACT welcomes *Spotlight* input and requests for advertising rates. Contact David Cockerell at david@aact.org to submit content. Contact Darlene DeLorenzo at darlene@aact.org for advertising rates and specs. David and Darlene are also available at the phone number above.



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- X Dane Winters
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Upcoming Meetings and Conferences

National Community Theatre Managing Directors Conference

November 3 - 6, 2017
Madison, Wisconsin
Co-sponsored by AACT
University of Wisconsin - Madison Continuing Studies

AACT Executive Committee

November 2 - 3, 2017
Madison, Wisconsin
Hosted by University of Wisconsin - Madison Continuing Studies

AACT Winter Meetings 2018

February 22 - 24, 2018
San Antonio, Texas
The AACT Board, Committees, Task Forces, and Teams will meet in San Antonio, TX for the AACT Winter Meetings 2018. Most meetings are open.
aact.org/calendar for details

Thanks

to Theatre Arlington and The University of Texas at Arlington for hosting the AACT 2017 TEAM Conference and Theatre Arlington's Nik Blocker for giving all the participants a great tour of Theatre Arlington.

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Spotlight

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AACT Insurance Program

AACT organizational members are eligible to participate in property, liability, and other coverages of the AACT Insurance Program.



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AACT NewPlayFest Opens with *Finishing School* by Elaine Liner



The AACT NewPlayFest world premiere of *Finishing School* by Elaine Liner opened on September 8, 2017 at the Elkhart Civic Theatre in Bristol, Indiana. The production ran through September 17.

In *Finishing School*, the oldest resident of an upscale assisted living facility befriends one of the youngest, and they meet for a daily ritual: reading obits ("the senior citizen's sports page"). Wizzer gives Al helpful advice about life among elders: "Never get between old people and a grocery store sheet cake. You will pull back a nub." Their days get interesting when two flirty women shake up the dynamic between Al and Wizzer.

Playwright Elaine Liner says, "I wrote the play for community theaters and their veteran actors who may not have had juicy leading roles in a long time. In my play, the older characters are funny, smart, feisty, and by the end, happier than they were in the first scene. I've seen many plays about old people, but never with characters as smart and hilarious as old people I know, including my mom," says the 63-year-old playwright who lives in Dallas. "The older I get, the more I realize we never lose all our teenage insecurities. Assisted living, in many ways, is like high school all over again."



Playwright Elaine Liner at the AACT NewPlayFest world premiere of *Finishing School* at Elkhart Civic Theatre in Bristol, Indiana

Elaine was delighted to be involved in an AACT NewPlayFest world premiere. She stated, "When you're in your writing space, typing words your characters are saying, you imagine that one day living, breathing humans will say those words the way you heard them in your head. In the production of my play at Elkhart Civic Theatre in September, this happened. The collaborative spirit at Elkhart Civic Theatre made working with them on *Finishing School* a dream. They brought fresh ideas to their production design and put real heart into the performances. Director Kevin Egelsky and artistic director John Shoup kept me in the loop the whole way. Being there in person for the final rehearsals and opening weekend let me hear their audiences react to the play just the way I'd hoped they would -- and to see performances that were the best a playwright could wish for."



Dave Dufour (Al) and Gail Janssen (Wizzer) discuss the topics of the day in a scene from Elkhart Civic Theatre's *Finishing School*



Elaine Liner

After more than 30 years as a journalist and theatre critic at newspapers in Texas and Ohio, Elaine Liner made her debut as a playwright and solo performer in 2013. Her one-woman "knit-com" *Sweater Curse: A Yarn about Love* premiered to five-star reviews at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe and Elaine has returned three more times to the Fringe to perform and to lead her Mastering the Media Matrix Workshops for festival participants. Her book *107 Publicity Boosters That Work* is a how-to-do-media guide for artists, writers, actors, and others. Elaine's other plays are *A Ripping Christmas Carol*, *Copeville*, *The Crickets' Lunch* (an homage to critics), and *Cappy & Monty: A Love Story*. Discover more about Elaine at elaineliner.com.

barbershop/gymnasium/theatre, the building now operates as a year-round community theatre seating 191 patrons. Elkhart Civic Theatre produces a six-show season mixed with musicals, comedies, and dramas, plus two youth theatre (ECTeam) productions as well as concerts, classes, and cabarets rounding out the year. elkhartcivictheatre.org ♦

Linda M. Lee



Elkhart Civic Theatre and the cast of *Finishing School* toast playwright Elaine Liner on opening night of the world premiere of *Finishing School*



The AACT NewPlayFest Producing Theatre, Elkhart Civic Theatre in Bristol, Indiana was established in 1946 as the "Elkhart Little Theatre." Elkhart Civic Theatre was incorporated in 1960 and bought their current home, The Bristol Opera House, in 1961. Built in 1897 as the town post office/



Linda M. Lee

Opening Night of the World Premiere of *Finishing School* by Elaine Liner at Elkhart Civic Theatre in Bristol, Indiana

Seated in front, the cast: Elkhart Civic Executive Director Dave Dufour (Al), Sandra Woodiwiss (Shirley), Melissa Auvil (Minnie), Gail Janssen (Wizzer)

Standing: Production Assistant and Costume Designer Victoria Kucharski, *Finishing School* Director Kevin Egelsky, Playwright Elaine Liner, Assistant Director Robert Franklin, AACT Executive Director Julie Crawford, Dramatic Publishing's Carrie Blomquist, Elkhart Civic Theatre Artistic/Technical Director John Shoup, Ayre Theatre Foundation's Linda M. Lee

more NewPlayFest on next page ►



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AACT NewPlayFest 2018 Upcoming World Premieres and Winning Playwrights

TBD (To Be Determined) by Paul Elliott
Lincoln Community Playhouse, Lincoln, Nebraska,
AACT Region V
lincolnplayhouse.com
January 19 - 28, 2018



Paul Elliott is the head of the Fierce Backbone Writers' Unit in Hollywood and is a respected television and screen writer who has written, produced, and/or directed both network and syndicated shows, as well as writing/producing and directing live entertainment spectacles for theme parks like

Disneyland, Disney World, EuroDisney, and Sanrio Puroland in Japan. Writing for stage has always been Paul's first love and his plays, *Legacy and Perspective*; *Ledge, Ledger and the Legend*; *Mind Games*; and *The Door* are produced all around the world. His comedy, *Exit Laughing*, was a winning play for AACT NewPlayFest 2014, and is available from Dramatic Publishing. paulelliottwriter.com

Eternity by Michael Cochran
Stage III Community Theatre, Casper, Wyoming,
AACT Region VII
stageiiiitheatre.org
January 26 - February 11, 2018

Michael Cochran graduated from University of Wisconsin-Whitewater with a BA in Theatre and received his MFA in Theatre from Southern Illinois University Carbondale.



Cochran worked professionally in Chicago and Kansas City as a Lighting and Scenic Designer until 1983 when the Market House Community Theatre (MHT) in Paducah, Kentucky hired him. Since then he has directed and designed hundreds of productions with MHT and has served as MHT's Executive & Artistic Director from 1996 to the present. He has written

several short plays and historical pieces produced by MHT, but this is his first full-length play to be produced nationally and published.

Mynx and Savage by Rebecca Gorman O'Neill
The Vortex Theatre, Albuquerque, New Mexico,
AACT Region VI
vortexabq.org
April 27 - May 13, 2018



Rebecca Gorman O'Neill attended Dartmouth College, and when she won the Eleanor Frost playwriting award her Junior year, she was relieved to have an excuse to stop acting. Rebecca earned her MFA in Dramatic Writing

from Carnegie Mellon University. Rebecca's original plays including *Tell-Tale* and *The Greater Good* have been produced in the U.S. and in Canada. Rebecca is a Professor of English at Metropolitan State University of Denver, where she teaches playwriting, screenwriting, cinema studies, and the graphic novel.



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Treehouse by Joe Musso
 Cottage Theatre, Cottage Grove, Oregon,
 AACT Region IX
 cottagetheatre.org
 August 10 - 26, 2018



Joe Musso lives in Birmingham, Alabama. His plays have been presented in numerous theatres and have won several awards, including the Great Plains Theatre Conference Holland New Voices Award, the MTWorks Excellence in Playwriting Award, the HRC Showcase Theatre W. Keith Hedrick Playwriting Award, and the Gloria Ann Barnell Peter Playwright

Competition. His full-length play *Conk and Bone* was published in the 2012 Great Plains Theatre Conference Reader, and his ten-minute play *The Rollercoaster of Love* was published in Smith & Kraus' The Best 10-Minute Plays 2012.

joemusso.com

Sweet by Denise Hinson
 County Seat Theatre Company, Cloquet, Minnesota,
 AACT Region V
 countyseattheatre.com
 September 28 - October 7, 2018

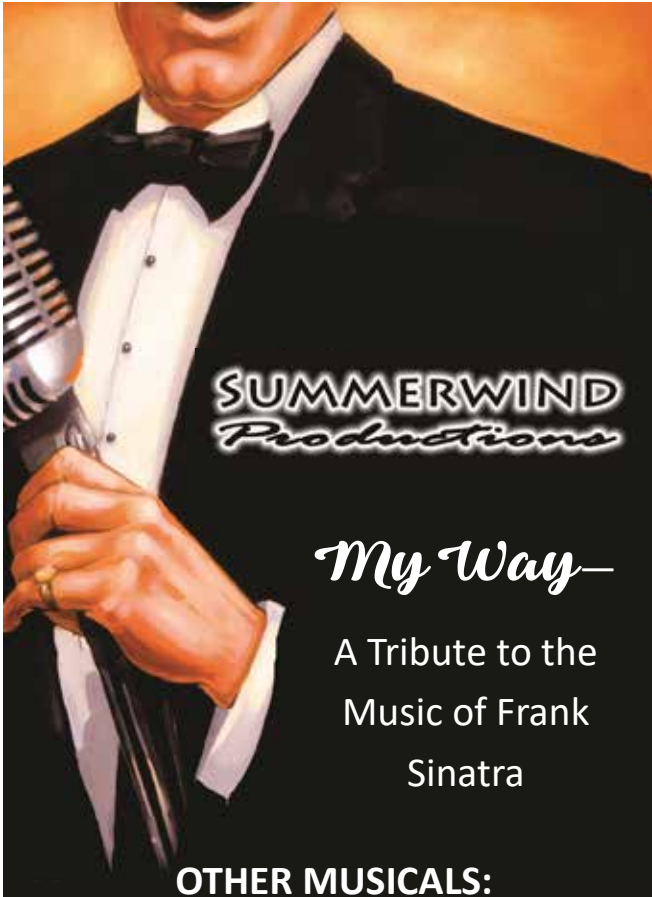


Denise Hinson resides in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Her plays have received productions and readings at Bottom of the Barrel Ten Minute Play Festival, Out of Order Ten Minute Play Festival, the Association for Theatre in Higher Education, Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival, the Linnell Festival of New Plays, and Stage It! Ten Minute Play Festival.



Dramatic Publishing Company publishes AACT NewPlayFest winning plays in anthologies and also licenses production rights for the winning plays. *American Association of Community Theatre AACT NewPlayFest Winning Plays: Volume 1* from the 2014 cycle with plays by Cece Dwyer, Paul Elliott, Jim Henry, Nedra Roberts, Barry Weinberg and Bo Wilson, and *Volume 2*

continued on next page ►



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- Vampire Monologues
- War of the Worlds

Scripts, Information, and Licensing at:
summerwindproductions.com

from the 2016 cycle with plays by William Baer, A.J. DeLauder, Jeanne Drennan, Thomas Hischak, Karen L. Lewis, Malcolm MacDonald, and Nedra Pezold Roberts are available from Dramatic Publishing Company. *Exit Laughing* by Paul Elliott and *Jellofish* by Jim Henry from the 2014 NewPlayFest cycle

and *Wash, Dry, Fold* by Nedra Pezold Roberts from the 2016 NewPlayFest cycle are also available in acting editions from Dramatic Publishing Company. Visit aact.org/dpc for direct links to Dramatic Publishing anthologies and plays and to learn more about discounts and special offers for AACT members. ♦



Schedule NOW to Become an AACT NewPlayFest 2020 Producing Theatre

Producing a new play is an exciting process! The theatre that produces a new play brings a brand new adventure to its company and its patrons. The world premiere of an award winning show is a feather in a theatre's cap! AACT is now accepting applications for producing theatres for the 2020 NewPlayFest.

Applications to be a Producing Theatre for AACT NewPlayFest 2020 are due by December 4, 2017. For the application form go to aact.org/newplayfest or contact the AACT office.

This festival cycle, Producing Theatres will be chosen well in advance to allow the theatre to schedule the world premiere production into their season. NewPlayFest 2020 productions will take place between February 2019 and July 2020.

AACT will select six member theatres to produce the winning plays. Producing Theatres will read the scripts that make it to the final round and select the winning shows to produce.

AACT is committed to further advancing the artistic quality and creative process for community theatres and artists. The theatre that produces a world premiere new play contributes to the future development of that piece and illustrates to the playwright what works or doesn't work. The interpretations of the director and the actors may reveal insights into the work that even the playwright didn't know were there. A first production allows the playwright to discover what needs to be rewritten to make it more effective. The winning plays will be published in an anthology by Dramatic Publishing Company.

New for AACT NewPlayFest 2020, AACT will assist each Producing Theatres with workshopping their selected play! To improve the production process, end product, and playwriting experience for the theatre and playwright, AACT is adding a workshopping component to this festival cycle. Each Producing

Theatre will have the opportunity to receive funds specifically to bring the playwright to the theatre for workshopping, and to attend the opening night festivities. In addition, funds are also available to help cover production and marketing costs. Jack K. Ayre and Frank Ayre Lee Theatre Foundation will provide this generous funding.

Submit a Script for AACT NewPlayFest 2020

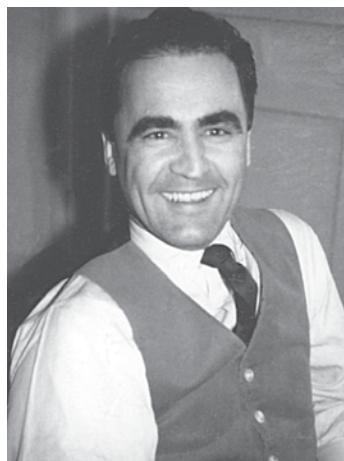
Script submission dates AACT NewPlayFest 2020 will be during March and April 2018. Details for script submission will be available soon at aact.org/newplayfest. Non-musical, full-length plays only. Scripts must be unpublished and must not have received a full production. (If selected, the AACT theatre's production is to be a world premiere.) Winning plays will be published in an anthology by Dramatic Publishing Company. Only one script per playwright accepted. No fees required for AACT member playwrights, \$10 script processing fee for non-members. For more information and script formatting guidelines visit aact.org/newplayfest.

Be a Reviewer for AACT NewPlayFest 2020

Individuals will be asked to volunteer to read and score the scripts. Reviewers evaluate scripts in several rounds of reviews. Join this exciting AACT festival by being a Reviewer. Application form and more information at aact.org/aact-newplayfest-2020.

Jack K. Ayre and Frank Ayre Lee Theatre Foundation Supports AACT NewPlayFest

AACT NewPlayFest 2018 is made possible in part by a grant from the Jack K. Ayre and Frank Ayre Lee Theatre Foundation.



Jack K. Ayre

Jack K. Ayre celebrated his 90th birthday before passing away in December 2011. At his birthday party, he sang with a barbershop quartet – one of his favorite activities – and celebrated with his cousin and lifelong friend, Frank Ayre Lee. Though as adults they lived on opposite sides of the country, the cousins kept in touch through letters that displayed a love for the written word and an irreverent sense of humor. Jack had participated in theatre productions at Drew University in New Jersey and at a com-

munity theatre in Connecticut in his younger years, and continued that interest when he moved to California. Mr. Lee was also an avid aficionado of theatre, and had dabbled in playwriting, adapting Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* for a children's theatre production, and penning *McSteg*, a tongue-in-cheek discourse, ribbing his cousin Jack and based on a scene in Shakespeare's *MacBeth*. The Jack K. Ayre and Frank Ayre Lee Theatre Foundation was created by the children of Frank Ayre Lee as a tribute to their father, who passed away in August 2012, and a legacy for the creative endeavors of Jack, who was an advertising executive and public relations director. The family is pleased to honor both men through a lasting legacy promoting new works for theatre through AACT NewPlayFest. ♦



Frank Ayre Lee

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aact.org/19

A Majestic History

On November 14th, 1925, the doors of the Majestic Theater opened for the first time, welcoming audiences to the largest vaudeville and silent movie theater in south-central Pennsylvania. Built by Henry Scharf as an annex to the historic Gettysburg Hotel, the theater seated 1,200 patrons and proudly served as the cultural crossroads of commerce, college, and community.

In the 1950's, the Majestic Theater stepped onto the world stage when President Dwight D. Eisenhower and First Lady Mamie Eisenhower regularly attended performances, often in the company of world leaders.

In November 2005, the Majestic was beautifully restored to its original grandeur and again welcomed audiences with an extraordinary showcase of performing arts and cinema.

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Destination Gettysburg

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Gettysburg – A Town Like No Other

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BETTER LATE LARRY GELBART

Marital vows and family dynamics are put to the test in this December-December-December romantic comedy.

DUSTY & THE BIG BAD WORLD CUSI CRAM

PBS's most popular animated show gets some unwanted notoriety when the producers pick a little girl and her two dads as winners of a model family competition.

POWER PLAYS ELAINE MAY & ALAN ARKIN

From two veteran comedy writers comes this trio of short plays exploring the collision of wills and the fine line between reality and absurdity.

THE WAVERLY GALLERY KENNETH LONERGAN

Irrascible but increasingly erratic Gladys has run an art gallery in a small Greenwich Village hotel for years, which may now be replaced by a coffee shop.

ADRIFT IN MACAO CHRISTOPHER DURANG & PETER MELNICK

From the master of outrageous comedies comes this musical parody of noir films, full of songs, gags, and farcical shenanigans.

BIG NATE: THE MUSICAL JASON LOEWITH, LINCOLN PEIRCE & CHRISTOPHER YOSTRA

Based on the popular comic strip, sixth-grader Nate Wright must take his game to an all-star level to capture beautiful Jenny's heart and win the Battle of the Bands.

FLY BY NIGHT KIM ROSENSTOCK, WILL CONNOLLY & MICHAEL MITNICK

A comic rock-fable and sweeping ode to young love set against the backdrop of the northeast blackout of 1965.

HANDS ON A HARDBODY DOUG WRIGHT, AMANDA GREEN & TREY ANASTASIO

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It Works Every Time

The AACT Community Theatre Management Conference held in Rochester, Minnesota

By Merritt Olsen

I've attended the biennial Madison Wisconsin Management Conferences multiple times. They're held on a weekend in November and facilitated by John Viars, of the Des Moines Playhouse. I always left with ideas to steal, renewed energy, and a unique sense that I was not alone in the good fight. Last June, fellow board members of the Rochester Repertory Theatre and I took part in AACT staff member Ron Ziegler's version in Rochester, Minnesota. The experience was as good as ever.

A wonderful transformation occurs over the six sessions of the conference.

This Conference is geared to theatres with smaller budgets, and who may not have full-time staff. It's a simple formula: an open-ended free-flowing sharing of successes, horror stories, concerns, and advice. The exchanges are roughly tied to a series of topics covering critical aspects of theatre management.

Participants tend to fall into categories: the novice, thrown into the responsibility of rescuing a theatre in crisis and looking for a lifeline; the dreamer, who, like Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland, wants to put on a show; the enthusiastic workaholic eager to share new approaches, secrets, and programs; the fragile workaholic on the brink of burnout; the seasoned veterans; and the remaining folks with a combination of parts of the above.

A wonderful transformation occurs over the six sessions of the conference. We move away from being intimidated or evangelical or mired in distractions from home. We begin to listen and to appreciate the contributions that each of us bring to the conversation. We build trust and friendships that we can continue by text, email, or even picking up the phone.

As before, "ah-hahs!" hit me throughout the discussions. On fundraising, I caught up on current demographics of audiences; on play selection, to not forget the mantra, "Can we do this brilliantly?"; and I was reminded that each of us is a "bridge to the future." Kelly Hain, the Rep's play selection chair said, "I was amazed to hear how theatre groups large and small are facing the same challenges as our little theatre in Rochester,

Minnesota. What a wonderful opportunity to make connections with others as well as revitalize yourself."

"The Conference allowed me to step out of my world and hear wonderful stories and ideas from those who devote their lives to leading community theatre," said Mark Masbruch, our treasurer. My favorite take-away was one person who shared that they invite all of the hair dressers in town to their preview night. My hairdresser agreed that this is a great idea!

So, was the Conference worth it for us? Yes. Every penny.

Merritt Olsen is the former Executive/Artistic Director of Black Hills Community Theater in Rapid City, South Dakota and San Juan Community Theatre in Friday Harbor, Washington. Now retired, he and wife Janet live in Rochester, Minnesota.

The Next AACT Community Theatre Management Conference is coming up in June 2018

AACT Community Theatre Management Conference will be held again in conjunction with aactWorldFest in Venice, Florida.

The dates for the conference will be June 17 – 19, 2018.

Host hotel will be the same as aactWorldFest, Ramada Venice Hotel Venezia, and the festival discounts will apply.

CTMC registrants will receive a \$50 discount for aactWorldFest registration. Visit aact.org/worldfest





The Community Theatre Management Conference 2017 in Rochester, Minnesota provided information and renewed enthusiasm for theatre managers and was great fun for all attendees

Front row (left to right): Chad-Alan Carr (Gettysburg Community Theatre), Rusty Ruth (Spencer Community Theatre), Victor Funderburk (Windham Theatre Guild), Ron Ziegler (AECT CTMC 2017 Facilitator), Jean Warren (Brazosport Center Stages), Debbie Prince (The Theatre Company)

Middle row: Steven J Heron (Titusville Playhouse), Joel Soukkala (County Seat Theatre Company), Martha Funderburk (Windham Theatre Guild), Katrina Ploof (Theatre Winter Haven), Merritt Olsen (Rochester Repertory Theatre), Jeanne Skattum (Rochester Repertory Theatre), Ann Walsh (Gettysburg Community Theatre), Wesley Copeland (Brazosport Center Stages)

Back row: Dan Chesnicka (Theatre Winter Haven), Ramona Garcia (Childress Theatre Company), Kenneth Brown, (Cultural Fusion)

not photographed: Daved Driscoll (The Minnesota SkyVault Theatre), Bruce Bennett (St. George Musical Theatre), Kathleen Welker (Adobe Theatre), Laura Wiercinski (Green Bay Community Theatre), Lisa Cope (Playhouse in the Park), Jennifer Maki (Road Less Traveled Community Theatre), James Crow (Pecatonica Playhouse Main Street)

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AACT 2017 TEAM Conference, Valuable Information and Excellent Motivation!

By Natalie Klobuchar

The Memorial Opera House of Valparaiso, Indiana was proud to send its core staff to this year's AACT 2017 TEAM Conference in Arlington, Texas. Hovering at the threshold of the Memorial Opera House's 125th anniversary, our staff attended as a team and was excited and anxious to apply what we

excited, and with a plan to map out the future of our business' success. I'm glad we made the investment!" Scot also sat in on the Education track and brought home a cavalcade of exciting practical ideas that will help our theatre education program become the best in our community.



Lively and fun discussions are part of learning as ideas and experiences are shared, and solutions to problems are discovered

would learn at the conference to our business plan for the future. Our core staff consists of six members: Executive Director Scot MacDonald, Executive Administrative Assistant Natalia Klobuchar, Technical Director Scott Miller, Box Office Manager Stacy Ruiz, Production Manager Vicki Zimmerman-Gleason, and Marketing Director Amanda Dietrich. We were each assigned a partner and a track to attend as a team so as to absorb as much information as possible.

Artistic Vision and Educational Programming

Tracks facilitated by Dennis Yslas, Executive Director of Texas Nonprofit Theatres, and Cindy Honeycutt, Education Director at Theatre Arlington, Texas

Scot MacDonald, Executive Director, who attended the AACT Artistic Directors Conference 2014, was the biggest advocate for our staff to have this experience as a team. He was excited to participate in this track again and to share how what he'd learned three years ago had been applied to our theatre. Scot reflected, "It was extremely valuable for our group; I wanted my team to experience a specialized conference that would engage and inspire them the way it inspired me. Dennis' suggestions and guidance were invaluable to the day-to-day operations and growth of our business. This experience with my core staff did two things: 1) It brought us closer together and 2) It set the tone for a more productive future. Our team came back motivated,

Stacy Ruiz, Front of House Manager, has one of the most challenging jobs in our business, selling tickets. Dennis helped her focus on the most important aspects of her job and how to fine-tune some of the procedures she already has in place. According to Stacy, "One of the most important things I learned was that we need to add value to our product by not giving it away. The second most important thing I learned is that in order to be successful, productive systems must be in place and communication is essential." This track helped Stacy learn how to polish her already stellar operational skills, making her even more successful; feeling more successful makes her feel good about the work she's doing and when she greets a patron that feeling just radiates off of her, bringing that feeling of community and sense of belonging full-circle.

Development/Marketing Track

facilitated by Nancy Brozek, Director of Development and Community Relations at Grand Rapids Civic Theatre, Michigan

Amanda Dietrich, Marketing Director, focused on the marketing details of this track. While the ultimate goal is always to raise money and be a pillar of the arts in our community, Amanda's job is to make sure the Memorial Opera House is being represented properly according to our brand. Track leader Nancy Brozek shared trade secrets, showed creative practical tools, and even reviewed our marketing materials, giving her expert opinion. Nancy's guidance was indispensable and we can't wait to begin implementing her



Natalie Klobuchar and Amanda Dietrich of the Memorial Opera House in Valparaiso, Indiana with facilitator Nancy Brozek (center) of Grand Rapids (MI) Civic Theatre

advice! Track peers also brought with them unique and enlightening methods of marketing framed around their communities and their communities' needs. Bouncing ideas off of them and reviewing methods that have worked for us was encouraging, constructive, and insightful. Amanda stated, "I loved being able to meet other theatres and learn about them; it was inspiring."

I was Amanda's partner on this track and I steered my focus towards fundraising events. Having taken the lead on our in-house fundraiser in the past, I was eager to learn how to adjust our event plans to make them work best for our organization and for our community. Nancy not only reviewed and helped me tweak our current fundraiser event plan; she laid out event strategies for multiple types of fundraising events that we look forward to implementing. Armed with statistics, charts, and the results from her own theatre's fundraising campaigns, I feel much more confident in my role on the fundraising event team and cannot wait to bring the community an even bigger, better event.

Technical Theatre Track facilitated by Jared Land, Lighting/Sound Designer, Production Manager, and Michelle Harvey, Scenic Designer, both of University of Texas at Arlington

David Cockerell




Jared Land of the University of Texas at Arlington leads the Technical Skills Track participants in hands-on learning in lighting and sound equipment systems

The technical track was exclusively unique to the others. Our theatre has been very fortunate to be able to stay moderately abreast of current technology and its uses, but as the industry is constantly changing and evolving, it's not always easy to keep up. Scott Miller, Technical Director, participated and added, "I do so much in my theatre that, often, I run out of time to do extensive research. I liked all the online resources that I obtained." While Scott's focus is mainly on the technical aspects of our historical theatre, he was able to experience theatre in a different venue at the university. The comparisons between the two, while specialized, were instructive to the expansion of our technology capacity.

continued on next page ►

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Vicki Zimmerman-Gleason, Production Manager, has an extensive background, to say the very least. With degrees in Theatre and Stage Management from both Western Michigan University and Indiana University, Vicki was eager to share her keen insight and experience from working on hundreds of productions. Vicki reported, "It was nice to meet folks from other parts of the country who are in the same field. I enjoyed the final hour of our track where we discussed various elements of design in community theatre."

Our staff had an amazing experience with this conference. A common thread in our experiences is the refreshing, widened gaze each team member came back with after exchanges with other track members. Being able to bounce ideas and problem solving strategies off of each other was invaluable in finding solutions to problems. Mandy is spearheading a new media night to "Meet the Press," I'll be working with Scot and our Memorial Opera House Foundation to help raise our operating budget, Stacy has been strengthening policy and improving the outreach to our patrons, and Scott and Vicki have been improving production procedures with new policy implementation. We are excited to see what the future holds for us as we begin these new changes; so many opportunities will continue to sprout as we cultivate our mission to use theatre and the arts to build community and create a sense of belonging. Our team returned home inspired, excited, and armed with new tools to help keep our business around for another 125 years. We want to thank our foundation, the Memorial Opera House Foundation, for seeing the value in this experience for us as a team; the American



Michelle Harvey of the University of Texas at Arlington gives technical Skills Track participants hands-on instruction in painting texture techniques

Association of Community Theatre for providing this incredible conference, and Theatre Arlington and the University of Texas at Arlington for welcoming us so warmly. We had a wonderful experience and look forward to attending AACT educational conferences in the future! ♦

Natalie Klobuchar is the Executive Administrative Assistant at the Memorial Opera House in Valparaiso, Indiana. MemorialOperaHouse.com

AACT was a great experience for our team! We were all able to have fun, relax, and learn. Each track has allowed us to come back to the table with information that will propel our organization to the next level of success.

Stacy Ruiz, Front of House Manager, Memorial Opera House, Valparaiso, Indiana



SAVE THE DATE! AACT 2018 TEAM Conference

August 17-19, 2018

**Hosted by the Hale Center Theatre
Salt Lake City, Utah**

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Registration, Schedule, Hotel discounts, and more information will be available soon at aact.org/team



The AACT 2017 TEAM Conference was attended by a great team. Participants gained knowledge from the experiences of colleagues, leadership of the facilitators, and discovered many networking relationships



AITA/IATA World Congress and Amateur Theatre Festival 2017

By Frank Peot

The World Congress of Amateur Theatre was hosted by Mondial du Theatre August 21 through August 30, 2017, in Monte Carlo, Monaco. "This is a festival like no other, nourished as it is by the passion for sharing and openness in the simple spirit of friendship," welcomed S.A.S le Prince Albert II. The festival included forty-eight performances from twenty-four countries of

unity, diversity, and cultural development throughout the world. Lori Chase and Julie Crawford were presented with an Anniversary Award in recognition of the many international festivals that have been held in the U.S. Work of the Congress included officially recognizing China and Sri Lanka as Affiliate Members, and Poland, Uganda, and Zimbabwe as full members of the association. Most important on the agenda was the adoption of a new constitution for the organization adjusting membership on the Council to eight councilors and one president elected by the General Assembly. Also proposed were changes in the naming of the membership. Only parts of the new constitution were accepted. The major change was in the composition of the council to eight members. Tim Jebesen (US), Aled Rhys-Jones (UK), Sofia Wegelius (Finland), and Cyril Walter (Spain) will remain on the council. Rob Van Genechten (Belgium) will continue as president. Villy Dall (Denmark), Pierre Cellario (France), Christen Gbaguida (Germany), and Harald Volker Sommer (Germany) were elected as new councilors. Max Vendler (Sweden) was appointed as the new Account Controller.



US attendees Lynn Ruhl, Rosemary Ellis, Kathy Maldonado, Frank Peot, Roger Ellis, and Bevie Lord get in the picture at the Mondail du Theatre in Monte Carlo, Monaco

the world, eight colloquies, and three workshops. Performances were from: Great Britain, Chile, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Australia, Russia, Denmark, France, Argentina, Japan, Italy, Belgium, Spain, Ireland, the Ukraine, Morocco, Sweden, Georgia, Mexico, Malaysia, the United States, Iceland, Slovakia, and Viet Nam. Each production provided the audiences with unique spectacular theatre, covering topics ranging from comedy, drama, and political statements, to folk legends, and musicals.

In addition to the many productions, the 16th Congress of the International Amateur Theatre Association – AITA/IATA was convened at this festival. Madame La Baronne Elizabeth-Ann De Massy and Patrice Cellario, General Commissioner officially welcomed Congress delegates on August 23, 2017, at the Forum in Auditorium Rainer III. Madam La Baronne thanked each person in attendance and reminded everyone that the festival is an opportunity for the "foot soldiers" of theatre to come together and share their talents, thoughts, ideas, and productions. Goals of the organization are to expand global

Each morning from 10:00am to 12:30pm Richard Finch (South Africa) and Manuel Ortiz (Chile) led the Colloques, which brought together presenting companies and festival attendees to discuss the performances of the productions from the previous evening. These meetings aimed at exchanges of the working methods of the groups in relation to theatre practices of amateur theatre in their countries. These sessions were



AACT Executive Director Julie Crawford and Lori Chase receive the aita/iata Anniversary Award presented to AACT in recognition of AACT supporting the many international festivals that have been held in the U.S.

not adjudications or critiques, but rather a time dedicated to bringing positive thoughts and exchanges about the companies and how they work with other theatre companies in their nation. "On stage you have a special freedom, to be, to express yourself in a way you are not necessarily able to do in real life, so with the Colloques we try to go deeper." – Richard Fink. "Theatre has a responsibility to create changes. As an art, it can make you grow mentally while still having a political and social function. That tradition started a long time ago, already with the place theatre had in Greek society. It is a living art, and a wonderful vector of

evolution." – Richard Fink and Manuel Ortiz. Colloques were filled with lively discussions, exchanges of ideas, and sharing. Also, many friends were made with thespians from all over the world.

Several productions were of special note (in this author's opinion). Hungary presented a unique approach to *Medea* using puppets and bringing some of the audience on stage much as would have been done in ancient Greece. Spain's production of *Assaig T4*, "Death Begins With Shoes," was a moving presentation set in a Nazi concentration camp showing the beginning and emphasizing the after effects on those who survived. The action showed the long and exhausting road the survivors endured to regain their homes. In their lives nothing is ever truly over. One especially unique production, 1984, presented by the Ukraine, was a retelling of Orwell's story of a closed world system led by Big Brother and its hero, Winston, who cannot endure living with the laws of the world. Without using any words Russia's presentation of *Comedy of Love* showed the way in which impassioned lovers set out to overcome the obstacles of the world. Of course in the end, love triumphs as always. The only traditional musical was *Nine*, presented by Mexico. Viet Nam's production of *Five Transformations* was based on legends of the country, in which a medium displayed changing personalities of various spirits that entered her body. This production

will be remembered much for its spectacular sets and costumes. *Farewell, My Concubine*, a one-man show presented by Malaysia, depicted the final moments when the hero, Xiang Yu, expressed his deep feelings for his land, his beloved concubine, and his faithful steed. It was a classic tale involving the love between Xiang Yu and Yu Ji. The United States' production from Gainesville, Florida's, Actor's Warehouse presented the dramatic *Tshepang: The Third Testament*, a story inspired by the horrifying rape of a baby in 2001. The actors, Steven Butler and Mandisa Haaroff gave an outstanding and memorable performance. These are only a few of the many outstanding productions seen at the IATA Festival. Each show had its own memorable moments, outstanding actors, and elements unique to each country. It was an experience of a lifetime never to be forgotten. ♦

Bevie Lord



Members of the U.S. Delegation, Julie Crawford, Frank Peot, Jim Walker, Bevie Lord, Lori Chase, and Roger Ellis represent theatre in America at the aita/iata meetings

Bevie Lord



The Red and White Friendship Night was an opportunity for U.S. Delegates Kathy Maldonado, Frank Peot, and Bevie Lord to step out and share their love of theatre with delegates from around the globe

Bevie Lord



Bevie Lord enjoys theatre presented from around the world. Here she visits with a performer from the production of *Five Changes* from Le Ngoc Theatre in Hanoi, Vietnam

Plans Moving Ahead for aactWorldFest 2018, “Festival in Paradise”



Community theatre lovers from around the globe are getting ready for aactWorldFest 2018! Venice Theatre, located on the beautiful Gulf Coast of Florida, is once again hosting this spectacular event that runs June 18 through June 23, 2018. The theatre's Executive/Artistic Director Murray Chase encourages you to visit aact.org/worldfest where you can find information about the event as well as register online in just a few clicks. Please follow the festival on Facebook, too, at [Facebook.com/AACT-WorldFest](https://www.facebook.com/AACT-WorldFest).

Chase and his wife Lori recently attended the Mondial du Teatre in Monaco where they recruited more excellent productions to travel to Venice in June. The list of participants is now up to 11 countries and 13 troupes, with a few more to come. As of October 1, commitments have been received from Armenia; Chile; Georgia; Germany; Jerusalem, Israel; Televiv, Israel; Italy; Nepal; Russia; Ukraine; Colorado, USA; Washington, USA; and Zimbabwe. Wow!



Danny Danisch

The Wild Bunch from Berlin, Germany will present Request Stop by Harold Pinter at aactWorldFest 2018



Melting Point

An international theatre festival isn't complete without participation from Russia! Their 2018 entry is Chook & Gek from Melting Point in Saint-Petersburg

Early Bird Pricing

(Register before Feb. 1, 2018 and save \$25 off the full festival rate of \$363)

- \$225 for AACT members
- \$338 for non-members

Student pricing for full festival (Save \$100 off the full price anytime!)

- \$180 for student AACT members
- \$263 for student non-members

MainStage Only Pricing

- \$230 for AACT members
- \$313 for non-members

Student Pricing for MainStage only

- \$155 Student AACT member
- \$238 Student non-member

Special hotel rates are also available.

Please check aact.org/worldfest for details.



Yoram Loewenstein Performing Arts Studio

The Yoram Loewenstein Performing Arts Studio from Tel Aviv, Israel is returning to the festival with their show One of a Kind, written and directed by Yael Boutton and Aviv Carmi

In addition to enjoying dynamic performances from these groups, festivalgoers can expect a wide selection of interactive workshops, much socializing, and the chance to enjoy all that “the sunshine state” has to offer.

Lori Chase, Coordinator for aactWorldFest 2018, is still recruiting event sponsors, workshop leaders, volunteers, and vendors. Please contact her if you would like to participate at lorichase@venicetheatre.net.

You'll have the time of your life at this Festival in Paradise! Go to aact.org/worldfest to learn more and register today. ♦



HELP! Where Do I Go?

How to Get the Most from Your AACT Website Theatre Resources

By Geoff Leonard-Robinson

Whether in the early planning stages or in the midst of a production's final preparations, when we need help we usually need it now. It oftentimes doesn't matter how proactive we've been, because perplexing questions or pesky issues can blindsides us from out of nowhere at the drop of a hat.

Then there's the multitude of administrative and organizational situations that need to be addressed, whether they're legal, internal, or seemingly unique to our local situation.

We all know the frustration of reaching out for assistance from the source we believe can help us, only to be re-directed to another department, source, or contact. Then we have to start from scratch, explaining our situation all over again in a brand-new plea.

To guide members most efficiently to the help needed, here's a breakdown of four resource options available through the AACT website, and what types of inquiries each are intended to help address. To access these resources, you must be signed in with your username and password.

As always, if you have any suggestions to enhance these member benefits, or any others, don't hesitate to reach out to your AACT staff, board, region representative or state contact. We're here to serve.

AACTivity

Web address: aact.org/aactivity

Contains: Resources uploaded by AACT member companies. You must request an account to add or edit your company's information, and have full access to the database. (Viewing the Production List is open to all.)

- Theatre experiences with specific shows (Production List)
- Job descriptions
- Documents, including:
 - o mission statements and bylaws
 - o policies and procedures
 - o employee handbooks
 - o artistic contracts
 - o and more

Note: Other forms are available from the Resource Library (see below). Sample bylaws and mission statements are available online at: aact.org/starting. Generic job descriptions are available at aact.org/people.

AACTList

Web address: aact.org/aactlist

Contains: An email discussion group for AACT members. You must subscribe to the list. Instructions are provided on the AACTList page.

If you're:

- looking for a specific prop
- special costumes
- want to know how to solve a particular problem
- how/where to find something you need

AACTList lets you ask multiple people and theatres at once for information or help. It also lets you provide answers and help to other members.

Resource Library

Web address: aact.org/library

Contains: Hundreds of articles and forms on a wide spectrum of topics of importance to community theatres, and those who work in them.

Topics include:

- Acting and Directing
- Administration and Management
- Boards and Governance
- Business and Legal Forms (Production)
- Front of House, Fundraising and Grants
- Insurance
- Marketing/PR/Publicity
- Rights and Royalties
- Technical Topics
- Volunteers
- Computers, and Internet Technology

Most articles are in PDF (Adobe Acrobat) format; most forms are in MS Word format, so you can customize them to meet your needs.

Resource Roster

Web address: aact.org/roster

Contains: A way to seek expertise on specific topics. Submit your question on the online form, and the Resource Roster Coordinator will match it to an AACT member experienced in the topic you've selected. (If you are looking for something very specific, such as a prop, sample documents, or references for consultants, please use AACTList, so that you can reach multiple people.) ♦

Geoff Leonard-Robinson is the new AACT Member Engagement Director. See page 31 for more information about Geoff.



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Lessons From an International Stage

By Steven H. Butler

Six years ago when I helped to create Actors' Warehouse, I never would have imagined we would be representing the United States at the Mondial du Theatre in Monaco. I never would have imagined that for nine days at this international amateur theatre festival, the cast, crew, and I would take part in various colloquies and workshops, watching three different productions each night, and engaging in a bounty of cultural exchanges.

Each day there was a buzz in the air as to which country would be arriving. As countries arrived at the festival village they were greeted at the front door with the waving of their nation's flag. Troupes were then ushered to a champagne reception to meet festival dignitaries. Very impressive! Understanding that this probably would be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, our team made a collective decision to take full advantage of the entire festival.

What's the best way to communicate to an international community?

Great magic was created on stage each night as twenty-four countries exhibited great talent and their love for the theatre. During the colloquies, following the previous night's performances, the actors and directors provided engrossing discussions pertaining to their productions. I was thrilled and inspired by several productions and their discussions. It all gave me a generous portion of food for thought. *What's the best way to communicate to an international community?*

As I witnessed these countries coming together, most of us not knowing each other's language, our mission was to use theatre as our common ground. But how can theatre be used (in a production 60 minutes or less) as a common language? So, I've been and continue pondering the following questions:

- What does it take to produce a dynamic international theatrical piece?
- Considering culture (our own or others), what stories do we or do we not tell?
- Consider all the tools we have (dance, music, etc.), what do we include and what do we leave out?

Going into this, I was filled with great excitement as well as concern. My greatest concern was how our production would be received, would it be understood. Troupes communicated using dance, pantomime, dialogue, and/or monologue. As I

reflect on the different modalities used, I consider dance and pantomime as the most straightforward. However, the biggest challenge would be to reach an entire international audience using one's native tongue. As well as other countries, we chose the latter with our production of *Tshepang* (*say-pang*) by Lara Foot.



Representing the United States, Steven H. Butler and Mandisa Haarhoff in the Actors' Warehouse production of "Tshepang"

Still the question remained, "How do I reach this international audience?" It became clear the first night as I watched a young lady from Chile deliver a stellar one-person performance in Spanish. I sat in awe as she filled the stage and the audience with fun and moving energy. I marveled at the tightness of her performance and her obvious grand talent. Afterwards, it made my heart smile to see her showered with accolades, "*Great performance. I don't understand Spanish, but*

somehow I understood everything you said." So what did she do differently for an international audience that you or I would have done for our local audiences? Absolutely nothing!

I considered this my model. The same passion and top qualities I bring to the stage here in the U.S., I could bring (as the Chilean actor did) to an international stage. The passion and quality of our work can transcend all languages. So, did it work? Let's just say I'm still feeling the goose bumps from the thunderous applause, shouts of "Bravo" and wonderful accolades we received just like our Chilean counter-part did (this was something that did not happen for every performance).

I like what has happened and I would like for it to continue. So now it's time to take what I have learned and experienced in Monaco, combined with the three earlier questions and create dynamic theatrical pieces that can be taken to an international stage. It's time to create more theatrical pieces ready for cultural exchange which will present the highs and lows, the shiny and not-so shiny angles of our American culture. Bonjour tout le monde, nous sommes ici (*Hello World, we are here*)! ♦

Steven H. Butler is the Artistic/Executive Director for Actors' Warehouse located in Gainesville, Florida.

Make A Legacy Gift

Please consider including American Association of Community Theatre in your legacy plans through a will, trust, life insurance gift, or other legacy gift. Through these special gifts, friends like you are able to sustain AACT's mission and provide learning experiences for AACT member companies participating in the AACTFest national festivals.

To learn more about legacy planning, visit aact.org/legacy or contact the AACT office at info@aact.org

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Something Wicked This Way Comes...

Update on Hurricanes Harvey and Irma

By Geoff Leonard-Robinson – Member Engagement Director

Proving to be a catastrophic year for hurricanes, 2017 dealt a double blow to the United States with Hurricanes Harvey and Irma. Harvey made his U.S. landfall in Texas on August 25 and, just over two weeks later, Irma made her U.S. landfall in the Florida Keys on September 9. Both hurricanes inflicted major damages as Harvey stalled and dumped torrential record rains in Texas and Louisiana; then Irma spent over 24 hours inflicting misery on Florida, moving from the Keys to Georgia and covering the entire state as she moved northward.

As theatre folk, we wonder what impacts our fellow thespians and their community theatres may have suffered. After Harvey, AACT identified thirty member theatres along the coastlines of Louisiana and Texas and contacted them to assess damages.

Two weeks later, AACT turned its attention to those member organizations located in Florida and identified all sixty-three as potentially impacted. Once again, contacts were made to determine what damages were experienced and what help was needed.

HURRICANE HARVEY

Thankfully, overall the impacts experienced by Texas and Louisiana member theatres were not catastrophic. However, many had to delay or cancel productions that signaled the beginning of their 2017-2018 seasons, while others suffered loss of income from educational programs due to evacuated residents and children relocated to attend schools in other areas.

While several experienced some type of cosmetic damage from the wind or minor flooding from the storm surge, for most it was minor or managed relatively easily. However, two of our Texas member theatres did suffer more significant damage.

Katy Visual and Performing Arts Center (KVPAC) suffered severe damage to their roof, as well as flooring, and some walls in all ground floor areas of their two buildings. Their landlord is addressing the roof issue, but the major work to be done in restoring and recovering floors, added to their loss of income from students in educational programs being relocated, has an estimated price tag of \$60,000. And, yet, the show has gone on as KVPAC has already produced two post-Harvey productions: a student production of *Uncensored: Young Frankenstein*, and the KVPAC Encore Players Community Theatre production of *Reefer Madness, the Musical*.

Those wishing to provide any financial assistance to our friends at Katy Visual and Performing Arts Center can do so by visiting their website at kvpac.org.



Flooding outside the Orange Community Players theatre

Meanwhile, 140 miles east, the **Orange Community Players** had already been in the midst of a fundraising campaign to address serious roof issues at a cost of \$35,000 when Hurricane Harvey came ashore. Not only did winds cause additional damage to their roof, the storm surge flooded their lobby, auditorium, the structure under their stage, and all rooms of their facility. The theatre has been gutted, dried out and had an anti-mold spray applied. Initial cost estimates to address their total facility needs has surpassed \$50,000.

The impact on the Orange Community Players theatre was substantial. Unfortunately, the level of damage inflicted upon the facility led their board of directors, half of whom were flooded out of their homes, to cancel their 2017-18 season and focus on needed fundraising. Their goal is to once again have community residents tread the boards beginning the fall of 2018.

Individuals or organizations that wish to assist Orange Community Players with financial donations may do so by visiting their website at orangecommunityplayers.com.

Tanya Guilarte



Interior flood damage at Orange Community Players

HURRICANE IRMA

As with Hurricane Harvey, fortunately the majority of member organizations in Florida escaped severe damage. There were very few areas in the entire state that did not lose power, face fuel shortages, and feel the impact of resident evacuations.

Hurricane Irma dealt serious blows to at least two community theatres: Marathon Community Theatre in the Florida Keys and The Players Centre for Performing Arts (The Players) in Sarasota.

Marathon Community Theatre, located just 26 miles from where the eye of Hurricane Irma first made landfall, experienced serious impact. Large portions of the theatre's roof collapsed, allowing the entire facility to be flooded by torrential rains from above, while saltwater surges from both the Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico had risen from below. No area was untouched as all areas of the facility were severely affected.

After reviewing the full extent of the damage, and considering the time and money necessary to restore their home, Marathon Community Theatre determined that there was no alternative but to cancel their 2017-18 programming. They face weeks of clean up and months of fundraising and painstaking

continued on next page ►

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restoration of their performance and office spaces. Estimates of facility repairs, equipment replacement, and lost income are expected to exceed \$200,000.

For those who wish to assist Marathon Community Theatre through benefit proceeds or other financial support, please go to the theatre's website at marathontheater.org.

Located on the western coast of Florida, south of Tampa, **The Players Centre for Performing Arts** in Sarasota also suffered significant loss. Their rooftop air conditioning units and major areas of the roof itself were heavily damaged. Torrential rains poured into the theatre proper destroying the stage floor and damaging their grand drape beyond repair. Unfortunately, with a wind insurance deductible of \$125,000, much of the assessed loss will need to be absorbed by the theatre itself.

At press time, The Players, had already begun the process of addressing the damages incurred by their facility. Rooftop air conditioning units and damages to the roof itself were being inspected and repaired, and the stage subflooring was ripped up and replaced with the added assistance of volunteers from nearby Venice Theatre. While the tenacious staff and volunteers are committed to presenting their 2017-18 season, internal estimates of all repairs and loss of programming income in the interim approach \$100,000.

Anyone able to assist The Players in addressing the monumental financial challenge they now face can do so by visiting their website at theplayers.org.

Not every member organization in Texas, Louisiana, and Florida were as severely affected as the four featured above. However, scores of our groups suffered from loss of income due to cancelled performances and educational programs, as well as from waiting for patrons and supportive businesses to return to their communities and recover from their own losses. Please keep all these areas, their residents, businesses, and arts organizations in your thoughts as they struggle to rebuild, restore, and resurrect from the devastation inflicted by these disasters. ♦



Michelle Branchi

Volunteers ripping up damaged stage at The Players Centre for Performing Arts



Michelle Branchi

Venice Theatre volunteers joined forces with The Players for a full day of stage repairs

Geoff Leonard-Robinson Joins AACT Staff as Member Engagement Director

AACT is pleased to announce Geoff Leonard-Robinson has joined the AACT staff as Member Engagement Director. Geoff will utilize his theatre experience to communicate with AACT members and provide guidance to inspire networking among current members and to encourage new members.

Geoff has been a theatre performer and director for over 30 years. His theatre background includes six years as the managing and artistic director of River's Bend Playhouse (IN), which he founded; director of professional summer stock at the Shawnee Summer Theater (IN); director for summer productions at Theatre Workshop of Owensboro (KY); director of development and education for Evansville (IN) Civic Theatre; and five years as a high school vocal music and theatre director.

Other theatre involvement has included serving on the board of directors of AACT; regional theatre festival adjudicator; state theatre festival adjudicator for Ohio, Tennessee, Arkansas, Indiana and Wisconsin; workshop presenter for state and national theatre festivals; selected to present two workshops for



Geoff Leonard-Robinson

the National Endowment for the Arts in Milwaukee, Wisconsin; and twice served on the review panel for state arts grants in community theatre at the request of the Florida Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs.

Geoff served as senior minister for Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) Key West and subsequently for St. Luke's MCC in Jacksonville, Florida from 2001-2007. In 2008 he began working with American Airlines. From 2012 to 2014, he served as Communications Specialist for AA's Aircraft Maintenance and Engineering organization, writing and editing for their daily news product and monthly magazine, *Leading Edge*, for which he received an international excellence in feature writing award. Geoff began his work as Member Engagement Director with AACT August 14, 2017. He lives in Fort Worth, Texas with his husband

of sixteen years, Steven, and their four cats: Theo, Caitlin, Alexis and Jackie.

AACT encourages anyone to ask Geoff how to engage with AACT programs and benefits, and connect to the national network of America's theatres and theatre lovers. ♦

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“Audiences love the show, ticket sales are fantastic!” Bell Tower Theatre, Iowa

“One of the sweetest and funniest scripts we’ve read in years!” Rainbows Comedy Playhouse, Pennsylvania

“What a brilliant script!” Script2Stage2Screen, California

Photo: 7-10 Split, Port Stanley Festival Theatre

Michael John LaChiusa Inspires All with Headliner Workshop at AACTFest 2017 National Festival

By Lynn Nelson

In a first for AACTFest, Rodgers and Hammerstein sponsored a headliner workshop at the recent national festival in Rochester, Minnesota. An appreciative audience heard Michael John LaChiusa challenge us to take risks and face challenges in order to experience greater success in whatever endeavor we undertake. The Tony Award-nominated composer and librettist used examples from his professional life, as well as his community theatre upbringing, to bring those points home. LaChiusa grew up in Chautauqua, NY, doing summer community theatre and honing his musical skills. He moved to NYC in 1980 and has since been a prolific composer. He's probably best known for his Tony-nominated musical *Marie Christine*, based on the classic Greek tragedy *Medea*.

Group in New York City. LaChiusa acknowledged, "Like the best community theatres, Transport Group is fiercely independent and certainly not afraid of taking a risk."

A very large part of what we hear today is about mitigating risk – whether it be financial risks, security risks on our computers and in public places, or health risks in today's environment. LaChiusa reminded us that while many of the



Speaker Michael John LaChiusa talks to an attentive audience about the benefits of taking risks

As a teenager in Chautauqua, LaChiusa wrote the incidental music for their summer community theatre production of *Picnic*. He used this experience to illustrate reaping rewards from facing your fears and taking risks. Just this past year, he wrote the score for a revival of *Picnic* produced by Transport

cautions are sound, risk-taking has gotten a bad reputation. He led the group to look at when not taking a risk becomes in and of itself dangerous. Taking risks leads us to explore – to challenge – and to change. Beginning with the Greeks, theatre has taken on exploring the human condition. "From

Hilarious Comedy Plays!

The Supermarket Sisterhood 7 Female, 2 Male | Two Acts

As if the daily skirmishes with farcical customers and the dim-witted men in their lives, wasn't enough, the women who operate the checkouts at the Discount Co supermarket are now facing a new boss and the prospect of losing their jobs due to newly installed automated checkout aisles. If the women are going to endure these challenges they're going to have to fight together and take things to a whole new level. Hilarious, madcap humor to tickle your funnybone and stir your heart.

'Twas the Fight Before Christmas! 4 Female, 2 Male | Two Acts

Think your family is complicated? Meet the most dysfunctional family you can imagine as they try to navigate Christmas. Peace on earth and good will to all men? Not likely! Ever since her husband died, Mary's horrible adult children have been ruining Christmas. This year, with the help of a suicidal French psychiatrist, Mary is determined to take Christmas back. Hilarious and uplifting Christmas comedy.

The Old People Are Revolting! 5 Female, 2 Male | Two Acts

Hilarious comedy about seniors seeking revenge! The residents of the Sunshine Retirement Village have had enough: they're revolting! Bursting with eccentric characters and crazy shenanigans the play is great fun to stage and a huge audience pleaser.

My In-laws are Outlaws!

4 - 6 Female, 2 - 4 Male | Two Acts
Annie discovers her in-laws are outlaws... and her mother in-law has hired a mad group of assassins to kill her! How will Annie, a mild mannered Librarian, outwit the best of the Italian, Russian and Irish contract killers? This is outrageous, laugh out loud comedy at its best.

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the Greeks to Shakespeare; Shakespeare to Ibsen; from Rodgers and Hammerstein to Stephen Sondheim to Lin-Manuel Miranda, the theatre has taken the risk to explore what makes us, us.”

LaChiusa gave us several examples of personal risk-taking that paid off well for him professionally:

- The idea for writing *See What I Wanna See*, a musical based on three obscure Japanese short stories, was laid aside for many years. A germ of an idea grew into an idea about how to weave them into one story with a musical palette interwoven throughout and using lyrics suggestive of haiku. The show has now been produced all over the world and “...the agent who’d told me I was insane has long since quit the business to become a flight attendant or a personal chef (I forget which). If I hadn’t acted on the persistent feeling that I’d left something unexplored – and the sincere belief that I was a coward for not taking the risk – *See What I Wanna See* would not have been. What I learned from this experience was that to explore is part of human nature and wanderlust is a necessary trait for any writer to have. It’s just that I’d rather explore three obscure Japanese short stories than a hit commercial movie featuring talking animals or superheroes in spandex.”

- LaChiusa contemplated adapting the classic Greek tragedy *Medea* into a musical for several years. Jokingly admitting that the idea really was crazy, he related a series of events that resulted in an award-winning musical. A young Julliard graduate auditioned for one of his off-Broadway productions and although she was not right for that role, really impressed him with her vocal talent and fiery passion. At about the same time, his younger brother gave him a book about Marie Laveaux, a voodoo queen in New Orleans. This confluence of events gave him the idea of setting *Medea* in New Orleans with a mulatto heroine and brought us the musical *Marie Christine* starring the (then) up-and-coming star Audra McDonald. “In retrospect,” LaChiusa said, “I’m proud that *Marie Christine* is still considered controversial and audacious if only because I knew when writing it that I was going someplace I’d never gone before and I was taking the musical form along with me. But being an explorer doesn’t mean I’m fearless, just as risk-taking doesn’t mean I can afford to be reckless. I have to know what I’m going to explore, and most importantly *why*, before I enter the jungle – or the whole venture would be folly.”

- Another example of facing challenges and taking risks paying off was the birth and evolution of the musical *Giant*, based on the Edna Ferber novel. LaChiusa, working with collaborator Sybille Pearson, wrote a three-act, five-hour musical with a huge cast and elaborate plans for sets. They were scheduled to go

into production at a top-tier regional theatre when the stock market crash of 2008 happened. Dried up funding challenged them to be creative, and a simpler – and better – production premiered to excellent reviews in 2009. “We didn’t need massive sets or elaborate costumes or expensive stage gadgetry to tell our story. It was left to my score and Sybille’s book to make *Giant*, giant. We opened in the spring of 2009. By challenging our audiences to lean in, to *feel* time and history without haste or anecdotal abbreviation, to linger in a musical moment of tenderness, or sadness, sometimes violence or happiness, the experience proved gratifying.”

continued on next page ►

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LaChiusa entertained and challenged the audience with many additional inspirational anecdotes; time and space prevent all of them being assessed here. With a huge thanks to Rodgers and Hammerstein for underwriting this inspirational speaker, we will sum it up with a final quote from him. "Lucky me that I had a summer community theatre to begin this long trek of what I suppose is called a career. Lucky you that you never had to see me act. Without that experience long ago, far, far west on the tip of New York State, I wonder if I'd become a writer of musicals and consider that my profession. If I hadn't experienced working for nothing, begging and borrowing for sets and costumes, and rehearsing with a diverse and eclectic group of people who really were lovers, or the word I relish, *amateurs*, of the theatre, I might never have been so well-



prepared for the realities of an actual life in the theatre. The experience led me to exploration, challenge, and ultimately change and for that I'm grateful." And Mr. LaChiusa, we're very grateful to you for entertaining us, for challenging us to face our fears, and for encouraging us to take risks. ♦

Headliner Workshops at AACTFest 2017 National Festival also included

Insights into Arts Management, Barry Hughson, Executive Director, National Ballet of Canada

The State of Theatre in America (and how we can prepare for the future),

David Stewart, Director of Production, Guthrie Theatre, Minneapolis, Minnesota

Selected AACTFest 2017 National Festival workshops will be available for viewing by AACT members soon at aact.org. Watch for an email from AACT as to the availability of the videos online. Videos online will include:

Email Power Tips: Turn Your Email Into \$\$\$, Jarrod Kopp, Theatre Executive, Communications Consultant, Sand Springs, Oklahoma

Licensing and MTI Resources, John Prignano, Senior Operations Officer, Music Theatre International, New York, New York

Playing the Action, Stephen Carver, Director, Kalamazoo Civic Theatre, Kalamazoo, Michigan

Theatre Branding in the Digital Age, James Gallagher, Co-Director at Herman Advertising, Owner of Drama Queen Graphics, Annapolis Maryland

What Every Body Is Saying, David Stewart, Director of Production, Guthrie Theatre, Minneapolis, Minnesota

Artie's Advocacy Tip

Our communities need the arts. The arts foster vibrant communities and create productive places for people to live, work, play, and raise their families.

Our children need the arts. The arts ignite young imaginations and boost achievement in academic fundamentals.

Our economy needs the arts. The arts put people to work, produce tax revenue, stimulate business, and retain a talented work force.



Spotlight Award Honors Shannon Egbert

The *AACT Spotlight Award* partners AACT with theatres to recognize individuals and organizations for long or special service that has had a significant impact on the quality of their local theatres. Any AACT member theatre may apply to present the Spotlight Award.

SHAPE Performing Arts Centre, U.S. Army, Belgium, honored **Shannon Egbert** with the AACT Spotlight Award on May 20, following the final performance of *Peter Pan*. Shannon designed the costumes for the production, and it was her final show at SHAPE.

Shannon Egbert has volunteered for SHAPE Performing Arts Centre since 2008, first as a seamstress, then as costume designer taking responsibility for all show costumes. Shannon also served as house manager, organizing the front of house staff and recruiting and supervising volunteers. For the opening season of 2017, Shannon designed costumes for *Detachments*, which won a 1st Place Award for Overall Design at the IMCOM Annual One Act Festival in Kaiserslautern, Germany.

Shannon is a full-time teacher who manages to contribute more than 15 hours weekly to the programs of the SHAPE Performing Arts Centre. She is a passionate advocate of its programs and activities, productions, and the Performing Arts School curriculum. Shannon contributes greatly to the morale and welfare of SHAPE's programming, the community that they serve, and the staff who rely heavily on her valuable assistance. Her dedication and excellence has been a stunning example to patrons, volunteers, and the staff.

In his nomination letter, Daniel LaMorte, SHAPE Entertainment Director, states, "Ms. Egbert is always friendly, has a great sense of humor, and has compassion for the audiences that grace our theatre, the volunteers she works with, and for the actors, whose costumes she designs. Ms. Egbert is a treasured gift to our programming and should be recognized for her outstanding achievements." ♦



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Musical Theater Songwriting Challenge

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To encourage young artists to enter musical theater, the National Endowment for the Arts is expanding its Musical Theater Songwriting Challenge from last year's three-city pilot to a national program available to all high school songwriters working in any musical genre. Applicants submit a recording of an original song that could appear in a musical theater show. Partnering with the NEA in the Songwriting Challenge is the American Theatre Wing along with collaborators Playbill, Inc. and Disney Theatrical Productions.

Six regional winners will be selected in February 2018 for a trip to New York City in April to work with professional musicians, singers, songwriters, and producers during an intense weekend of workshops. The performance of their song by those musicians and singers will be judged by a panel of esteemed musical theater artists as the final competition and webcast live. One of the six will be selected as the national champion. Winners will receive scholarships and more.

Application Deadline: January 5, 2018

Details: arts.gov/partnerships/songwriting

Neil Simon Festival

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Plays must be full length (80 - 120 minutes) character-driven comedy that explores some facet of the American lifestyle. Musicals accepted. No previous professional production.

The winning script will receive a staged reading on July 27, during the 2018 Neil Simon Festival in Cedar City, Utah. The selected script will also be considered for full production in the 2019 season. The winning playwright will be invited to be a part of the staged reading process and will be offered a stipend to help him/her attend.

Deadline: March 15, 2018

Electronic submissions only

Submission fee: \$150. Fee used to pay respondents who will provide a written response to each submitting playwright, to help provide a travel stipend to the winning playwright to attend the staged reading and rehearsal development, and defray production costs for mounting the winning script in the 2019 Neil Simon Festival. *\$100 scholarship submission fee discount for full time college students.*

Details: simonfest.org/new-play-contest.html

For More New Play Contests see aact.org/contests

Milestones

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Golden Chain Theatre, Oakhurst, California
Summer Place, Naperville, Illinois
Village Players of Fort Thomas, Fort Thomas, Kentucky
Owosso Community Players, Owosso, Michigan
Shawnee Little Theatre, Shawnee, Oklahoma
South Carolina Theatre Association, Simpsonville, South Carolina

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Lamplighters Community Theatre, Staples, Minnesota
Players Ring Theatre, Portsmouth, New Hampshire
Academy Theatre, Meadville, Pennsylvania
Verona Area Community Theater, Verona, Wisconsin

Congratulations for your dedication and hard work in reaching a milestone in your theatre's history!

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Cad-Alan Carr



Encore Stage & Studio in Arlington, Virginia receives the AACT Twink Lynch Organizational Achievement Award from AACT Board Member Cad-Alan Carr on opening night of the Encore Stage & Studio production of The Music Man, July 21, 2017

Region IV Representative Lynn Nelson presenting Andre Bruce Ward the AACT Distinguished Merit Award at Theatre Memphis on August 18, 2017 in recognition of his 40 years as an award winning costume designer and over 250 productions at the theatre



Lynn Nelson

More on the Road on page 39 ►

Lynn Nelson



Barry Fuller was presented the AACT Robert E. Gard Superior Volunteer Award by Region IV Representative Lynn Nelson at Theatre Memphis on August 18, 2017. At 87 years of age, Barry has given volunteer service to the theatre for over half of his life—46 years



www.playsforyoungaudiences.org

Casey Holmstrom, Eric Sharp, Nastacia Nicole, H. Adam Harris and Autumn Ness in The Jungle Book by Greg Banks. Photo by Dan Norman

MTI Extends Special Offer for AACT Members

Music Theatre International (MTI) is extending its discount on a hand-picked collection of MTI shows perfect for community theatres. Featuring some of the hottest new releases, as well as beloved classics, the AACT Collection is full of award-winning musicals guaranteed to thrill and delight your audiences.

If you book a show from the AACT Collection before July 1, 2018 (for future performances), you will receive 25% off the standard rental fee and every fourth performance will be royalty-free. All perusals for these shows will be free for the dates of the offer.

In addition, MTI will donate 10% of the rental fee collected to AACT as part of this special offer.

The MTI AACT Collection includes:

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Cry-Baby

Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson

Theory of Relativity

The Robber Bridegroom

It Shoulda Been You

Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown

Little Miss Sunshine

Leap of Faith

Please visit aact.org/mti for details.



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In addition to the discount on the AACT Collection listed above, MTI also offers AACT members another discount on all musicals in their catalog. You can receive a 20% discount on standard rental fees for the first four MTI musicals produced during the season. In addition, if you produce five MTI musicals in the same season, you will receive the fifth standard rental package absolutely free. ♦

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Nominations Open mid-November for the 2018 AACT National Awards

AACT National Awards are presented each summer to recognize outstanding contributions to community theatre. Nominations are accepted for persons of all ages. The 2018 Awards will be presented at aactWorldFest 2018 in Venice, Florida in June.

Visit aact.org/aact-national-award-nomination to submit a nomination for 2018.

January 20, 2018 is the deadline to submit nominations.

Visit aact.org/awards for a list of AACT National Awards, Award descriptions, links to see who has received Awards in the past, and a link for the AACT National Award Nomination Form.

Nominations are welcome anytime for the **AACT Spotlight Award**.

The Spotlight Award is presented locally by AACT and an AACT member theatre for long or special service that has had a significant impact on the quality of local theatre. Nominations are accepted for persons of all ages. For more detail and to submit a Spotlight Award Nomination visit aact.org/spotlight-award. ♦

Geoff Leonard-Robinson



Stacy Ruiz and Vicki Zimmerman-Gleason of the Memorial Opera House in Valparaiso, Indiana visit with AACT Marketing/Communications Director David Cockerell at the AACT 2017 TEAM Conference at Theatre Arlington, Texas, August 17, 2017

Bevie Lord



AACT Secretary Frank Peot, Wisconsin State Contact Lynn Rubl, Vice President for Festivals Jim Walker and partner Jerry Oligmueller, Region I Representative Bevie Lord, and Steven Butler (U.S. entry Tshepang; The Third Testament director and actor) sharing some nightlife and camaraderie at the 2017 Mondial du Theatre in Monaco, August 24, 2017

Tim Jebesen



aactWorldFest 2018 Coordinator Lori Chase from Venice (FL) Theatre, AACT Executive Director Julie Crawford, and International Amateur Theatre Association (aita/iata) Vice President Tim Jebesen from Midland (TX) Community Theatre at the 2017 Mondial du Theatre in Monaco, August 26, 2017

Linda M. Lee



Playwright Elaine Liner, Finishing School director Kevin Egelsky, AACT Past President and Ayre Theatre Foundation's Linda M. Lee, and AACT Executive Director Julie Crawford at the AACT NewPlayFest opening night of Finishing School by Elaine Liner at the Elkhart Civic Theatre in Bristol, Indiana, September 8, 2017

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Careers in Theatre

Highlighting professional staff changes in theatre

Des Moines, Iowa – Earlier in 2017, the **Des Moines Community Playhouse** took a major step in preparing for its next 100 years (beginning in 2019) of community theatre production. **David Kilpatrick** was brought on board as the new Executive Director. This has allowed **John Viars**, who served in the dual role of Executive and Artistic Director for several years, to focus his energies into the Artistic Director role, play selection and direction. David's hiring also aided in the transition following the retirement of the Playhouse's Business Director **Rod McCullough**.

David previously served as the Executive Director of the La Crosse (Wisconsin) Community Theatre, a position he held since 2010. In that capacity, he also served as the Executive Director of the Weber Center for the Performing Arts in La Crosse. David's broad experience in theatre and staff management includes completing an \$8.4 million capital campaign in La Crosse. Prior to moving to Wisconsin, he served as Artistic Director of the Old Creamery Theatre Company in Amana, Iowa.

David earned a doctorate in theatre arts from the University of Missouri – Columbia, a graduate degree in theatre from Missouri State University, and an undergraduate degree from George Mason University. Addressing David's move into his new position, Des Moines Community Playhouse Board President Dennis Ogden stated, "We feel we have found the right person at the right time to move the Playhouse forward into the next 100 years of excellence."

South Bend, Indiana – **South Bend Civic Theatre** (SBCT) welcomes **Aaron Nichols** as its new Executive Director. An award-winning actor, director, and designer, Aaron recently completed the Executive Program in Arts and Culture Strategy at the University of Pennsylvania. Previously the Audience Development Manager for Shakespeare at Notre Dame, Aaron is honored to shepherd SBCT's diverse family of volunteers. "Our board of directors and I believe in Aaron's ability to lead our community's theatre, and I am very grateful to, and proud of, our board and search committee's extensive efforts to reach this exciting point," said Terry Bush, SBCT Board President.

Fort Worth, Texas – **Texas Nonprofit Theatres** (TNT) Board of Governors announces some exciting changes in its staff and assignments:

Dennis Yslas was selected to take the reins as Executive Director following the retirement **Linda M. Lee**. Dennis joins TNT after serving as Administrator for MainStage Irving-Las Colinas. His extensive nonprofit experience spans 25 years

working with organizations such as Fort Worth Opera, The Column Awards, Onstage in Bedford, and Theatre Arlington to name a few. Dennis has a long history with TNT and sat on the Board of Governors for the last four years where he was the Vice President of Strategic Planning. A long time actor (48 years) and director in the Fort Worth/Dallas area, he is a member of Actors' Equity Association for whom he serves as the Chair of the Liaison Committee for North Texas. Also a nationally recognized adjudicator for AACT, he has adjudicated at the state and regional levels and was the alternate adjudicator for AACTFest 2017 national festival.

Frieda Austin, was promoted to the position of TNT Managing Director. A Fort Worth native, Frieda has been with TNT for almost nine years and has also sat on the Board of Directors for several arts organizations where she has held officer positions. Her responsibilities as Managing Director include the day-to-day activities and streamlining existing processes of the organization's extensive programming. An experienced dancer, she is also a silk aerialist - having performed at the 2017 Fort Worth Fringe Festival amongst other performances.

Preston Isham, an employee with TNT for over two years, has been promoted to Programs Coordinator. Preston will now be managing the company's membership drive and creating, coordinating, and managing program timelines. He is also an actor, singer, and dancer who has performed extensively in the Fort Worth/Dallas area. ♦

Keep Everyone "In The Know"

- Hired a new member on your artistic or management team?
- Added a new professional position to your staff?
- Changed the title/responsibilities of one of your team members?

Help AACT members join in celebrating your organization's developments and stay up-to-date with whom to contact at your organization by submitting your professional staffing changes to *Spotlight* for inclusion in "Careers in Theatre." Positions listed are paid professional positions. Submissions should be sent to Geoff Leonard-Robinson at geoff@aac.org.

Visit the Job Postings on the AACT website at aac.org/jobs. Job postings are frequently added, so check back often.

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Event Cancellation Coverage – A Rare Insurance Policy

by Ken Roberts



One of the most difficult exposures to purchase insurance coverage for in the community theatre world is the loss of income due to the cancellation of a scheduled event or production. To be sure, there are policies and endorsements to policies out in the insurance universe that attempt to tackle this issue, but most of them are either far too limited in the scope of their coverage or are just too cost prohibitive to purchase. This makes it imperative to plan ahead with contingencies for those pesky last-minute catastrophes that force a change in plans.

Most of them are either far too limited in the scope of their coverage or are just too cost prohibitive to purchase.

To give an example, one of the most prolific underwriters of community theatre insurance in the U.S. provides a “free” endorsement to its general liability policies that offers a maximum amount of \$10,000 in coverage for a canceled event or production, but there are a few specifically described perils that allow for the collection of the loss of income and/or necessary expenses due to “cancellation, postponement or relocation” of that event. The coverage triggers are: **1. the Incapacity, Confinement, Illness, or Death of 50% or more of the participants**, unless that incapacity is due to a pre-existing medical condition, mental illness, or arises

out of a cause related to controlled substances; **2. Inability to Perform by 50% or more of the participants**, unless that inability is due to a concern or belief that participating is inappropriate, in poor taste, or a poor business decision, or if the inability is due to a violation of any law, or if the inability is caused due to air travel that is not by a common carrier; **3. Adverse Weather** that prevents the commencement, continuation, or completion of a scheduled event, but only if physical damage occurs to the property or facility to be used; and **4. Civil Authority** prohibits access to an event due to conditions that threaten the safety of the participants, spectators, or technical crew. As with all insurance coverage, the list of exclusions is longer than the list of covered perils, but coverage is very limited to say the least.

The premium to purchase a more comprehensive cancellation policy can be prohibitive, based on the average net proceeds from a production or fundraising event for a small nonprofit organization. It could run as high as 50% of the proceeds, which leads to most theatres assuming that risk without the benefit of insurance coverage. The best approach is redundancy, from having understudies for integral roles, to having another facility as a back-up in the event of weather-related damage or a restriction imposed by the local police or fire department. As the old saying goes, if you succeed to plan, you can plan to succeed.



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Change Is Inevitable - Deal with It!

by Twink Lynch

For the past several years, I have been writing about developing more effective Boards for our community theatres. This implies that our current Boards aren't as effective as they could and/or should be. A persistent problem is that often our Board members themselves do not perceive that they are lacking in effectiveness, and, what's more, many of them don't even think about holding themselves accountable to any objective measures of effectiveness such as:

1. the theatre has a clear vision, mission, and plan
2. the theatre has the financial resources it needs for present and projected needs
3. the theatre has the human resources it needs to offer a high quality theatre program, or
4. there is a strong program of recruitment for skilled, committed, and diverse Board leadership

Before the ice cube can change its shape, it has to thaw first.

So how do we help theatre Boards to get better, in spite of themselves? How do we invite our Board members on the exciting journey to problem-identification, insight-development and vision-building? If we are currently the only person in the group with strong enough learning needs that we seek workshops and seminars in boardmanship and then get frustrated when no one wants us to share what we learned, we may have to begin by cultivating one Board colleague at a time. But the whole process might be easier if we understand more about the nature of change.

Back in the 40s, when early research on group behavior got underway, Dr. Kurt Lewin described change as a process. He compared a person undergoing change to an ice cube, noting that before the ice cube can change its shape, it has to thaw first. If we try to reshape it while it's still frozen, we have to use aggressive tools like ice picks or saws. Needless to say, that process always results in losing some of the original ice. In order to maintain the integrity of the ice cube, we have to provide warming conditions enabling our cube to thaw and melt, and then we can pour it into a different container and freeze it into a new configuration!

The same is true of human beings. Change is hard because it threatens the status quo, and unless we feel safe (supported in a warm, thawing climate), we will resist change vigorously.

How do we help our Board members to "thaw and melt?" One way is to identify as many "forces" as we can that are responsible for the status quo. This exercise is called a "force-field analysis," and we borrowed it from the field of physics, but don't let that scare you.

Imagine the status quo as a straight, horizontal line with equal pressure above it and below it (that's why it's straight!). The pressure is supplied by "forces." For example, let's say our status quo problem is: Our Board is not very effective.

What forces might be at work below the line to impel change? They might include:

1. A major granting agency has just requested a copy of our long range plan
2. A new community theatre group has just formed in our community (or close enough to be a competitor)
3. Several Board members have expressed dissatisfaction with the way the financial information is presented to the Board
4. A Board member just attended a workshop on effective Boardmanship
5. We can't get anyone to agree to be President

Forces above the line resisting change might include:

1. There is a general feeling that we've always worked this way and we're solvent (or, "if the wheel ain't broke, don't fix it!")
2. Board members don't have limited terms and thus stay on for years
3. There's a perception that there's not enough time to do anything more than we're already doing
4. One or more Board members feel that if we change anything they will lose stature/power/choice of major roles on the Board (or on the "boards")
5. There are factions within the Board that make getting agreement on anything next to impossible

Once you have identified as many forces at work as you can, give each of them a “power value” on a scale of 1 to 5, as follows:

- 1 has almost nothing to do with the drive toward change
- 2 has relatively little to do with the drive toward change
- 3 is of moderate importance in the drive toward change
- 4 is an important factor in the drive toward change
- 5 is a major factor in the drive toward change

Once you’ve identified the forces and their relative strengths, the strategy is to lessen the power of the forces resisting change first. If you begin by strengthening one or more forces pushing for change, you may just increase tension in the group and end up being isolated by the others as a malcontent or troublemaker.

Keep in mind that just reviewing the bylaws can generate a discussion of needed changes.

In the above example, you might tackle the time issue (#3) and show how adding a short learning experience to scheduled Board meetings three to four times a year wouldn’t significantly increase the Members’ time commitment, especially if you controlled the agenda better! Ask each Board Member to identify one thing she wishes she knew more about and try to schedule training events to address the real things Board Members want to know, along with some things you may also perceive they need to learn. Try also to make the learning fun. Remember, adults like flip charts, overheads, handouts, and small discussion groups where everyone can really participate.

If you are the President or other officer, it may be somewhat easier for you to initiate this process. If you are not an officer, you may need to ally yourself with one or another influential member of the Board in order to get started (sort of like getting the Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval).

When all else fails, remember the work of Elisabeth Kubler-Ross.

Keep in mind that just reviewing the bylaws can generate a discussion of needed changes. And if your organization is moving toward a major fundraising campaign, that alone can cause an institutional review (in order to develop the case statement) and consequent surfacing of issues needing attention. If you have indeed attended a workshop on boardsmanship,

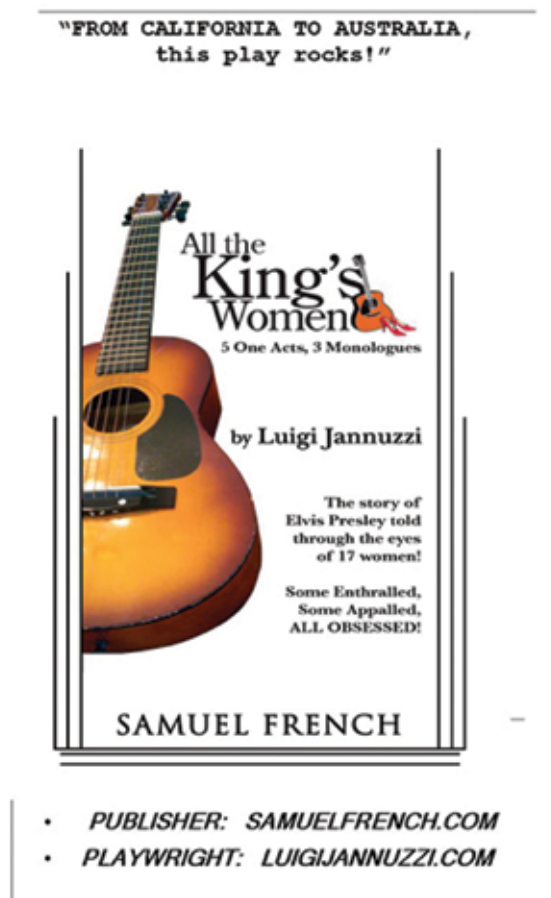
perhaps you could make a report to the Board, complete with giving the Members copies of the handouts you received.

Don’t hesitate to reach out to your colleagues in the field. AACT members may access and download various materials from the AACT website’s Resource Library and distribute them to their theatre’s Board Members. AACT’s online Resource Roster lists the skills of various members of AACT who are willing to share their areas of expertise by phone, mail, or email. See the article on page 24 for more details on these and other resources.

And when all else fails, remember the work of Elisabeth Kubler-Ross. Her work on loss (a direct result of change) centered on death and dying, but the model works for other kinds of change as well. The stages she identifies are: denial, anger, depression, bargaining, and acceptance. I believe most of our Board members are capable of working through and accepting change — if we “thaw” them first and excite them with a vision of what we are really capable of becoming. Go for it! ♦

Reprinted from Boards in the Spotlight, page 91

Twink Lynch wrote a regular column on boardsmanship for Spotlight for many years. Many of her articles are compiled into a relevant book for boards: Boards in the Spotlight, available at aact.org/store.



When	Who/What	Where	Information
Nov 2 - 3	AACT Executive Committee Meeting 2017	WI Madison	817-732-3177 aact.org
Nov 2 - 4	West Virginia Community Theatre Festival	WV Athens	304-288-9917 wvtheatre.org
Nov 2 - 5	Raising Your Voice: The Power of Theatre SCTA's 51st Annual Convention	SC Aiken	864-844-8111 southcarolinatheatre.org
Nov 3 - 5	South Carolina Community Theatre Festival 2017	SC Aiken	843-343-6560 southcarolinatheatre.org
Nov 3 - 6	National Community Theatre Managing Directors Conference	WI Madison	608-263-2790 continuingstudies.wisc.edu/conferences/national-community-theatre-managing-directors/
Nov 8 - 11	Florida Theatre Conference Festival 2017	FL Gainesville	941-488-1115 x247 flatheatre.org
Nov 17 - 19	Kentucky Theatre Association 2017 Conference	KY Pikeville	859-312-1041 theatreky.org
Nov 17 - 19	TANYS Festival 2017 Theatre Association of New York State	NY Auburn	315-685-8193 tanys.org

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