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News Release

City of East Lansing Merges with All-of-Us Express Children's Theatre

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EAST LANSING, Mich. — The All-of-Us Express Children's Theatre Board and East Lansing City Council recently entered into a merger agreement, bringing operations of the time-honored, local nonprofit under the umbrella of the City of East Lansing's Department of Parks, Recreation & Arts.

The All-of-Us Express Children's Theatre (AECT) has offered young people of all backgrounds, cultures and lifestyles the opportunity to produce professional quality plays, study many aspects of the dramatic arts and develop valuable life skills for two decades in the tri-county region. Now, in its 21st season entitled "Spreading Our Wings," the organization has found a new home in the East Lansing Hannah Community Center's (ELHCC) Albert A. White Performing Arts Theater, located at 819 Abbot Road.

"Since we are a City of the Arts, it seems only fitting that children in our region should now receive their dramatic art beginnings in East Lansing," said East Lansing Mayor Pro Tem Diane Goddeeris of the new merger agreement. "As a mother of three children who all went through the program, I can say with confidence that this organization truly does bring kids together at an early age to not only put on community plays, but to learn about all the pieces that go into creating a theatrical production. The theater is for the children by the children, bringing artistic enrichment and an understanding of performing arts to our region's youth."

According to Sandra Sigworth, incoming president of the AECT Board, what makes the AECT unique for aspiring thespians is the chance to work on virtually all facets of a production.

"Our productions work on a rotation process, so that the youth involved get a chance to do everything, from set design to props, acting and even assistance with directing," said

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Theater Merger Agreement - continued

Sigworth. “It really gives children the chance to fully understand performing arts, while also creating quality theater productions for the community. Alumni of the program have gone on to pursue theater in high school, college and beyond.”

Under the new merger agreement, all AECT workshops, classes, activities and productions will now be hosted at the ELHCC. In addition, the City will retain the AECT’s one regular part-time artistic director position, currently held by Miranda Hartmann.

“Ensuring the viability of this valuable artistic program in our region was at the heart of the AECT Board and City’s decision to join forces,” said East Lansing Parks, Recreation & Arts Director Timothy McCaffrey. “The AECT Board will continue to exist as a 501(c)(3) fundraising organization, while the City provides the location and administrative services that will allow the organization to continue to prosper in years to come. Our objective, from a City standpoint, is to operate the program entirely with the funds brought in by the various classes and productions.”

“This merger is a win-win situation for the All-of-Us Express participants, the community and the City of East Lansing,” added Sigworth. “All-of-Us-Express has survived for 20 years because it is proactive in responding to economic challenges. This year, however, funding for the arts took a hard hit. Our long-standing, positive relationship with the City of East Lansing came into play when we started exploring options for how we could reduce expenses by sharing resources with a neighboring organization. Our new partnership with the City will allow the AECT Board to focus more on bringing additional revenue and outreach to the program, rather than expending all of its energy running day-to-day operations.”

Upcoming Saturday Acting Academy: The AECT and City will be hosting classes as part of the Saturday Acting Academy for four different age groups at the ELHCC from Sept. 19 through Nov. 21. An Introduction to Creative Drama class will be offered to children, ages 4-8, on Saturdays from 10-11 a.m. and a Creative Drama and Characterization class will be offered to children, ages 8-11, on Saturdays from 10-11 a.m. In addition, an Advanced Characterization class will be offered to ages 11-15 on Saturdays from 11 a.m.-noon and an Advanced Dramatic Study class will be offered to ages 15-18 on Saturdays from 11 a.m.-noon. The cost to participate is \$50 for members of AECT and \$65 for non-members. Those interested in being a part of the Saturday Acting Academy can call the ELHCC at (517) 333-2580 for more information.

Upcoming Auditions: The Saturday Acting Academy will lead up to auditions for the AECT’s first production of the 21st season, “How Reading Came Back to Nowhere”. Auditions will be held Oct. 8 and 9 from 6:30-8:30 p.m. and Oct. 10 from 10 a.m.-noon at the ELHCC. Those auditioning need only to attend one of the times and must be available for callbacks if asked to attend. Callbacks will be held on Oct. 10 from 2-5 p.m. No previous experience or training is required to audition.

Community members can visit www.allofusexpress.org for more information about the AECT’s upcoming productions, workshops and more.

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