Summer 2016

Expressions

the newsletter of All-of-us Express Children's Theatre

Newsletter Editor:
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In The Spotlight... Liz Cooke, Artistic Director

When I was 9 years old, I was cast as the lead in my fourth grade play – I played a hamburger and it was about the digestive system, so clearly it was Tony Award material. I found out later that I was given the role because I was the loudest, but later I learned that was really a compliment.

It took almost no time at all before I was obsessed with theatre and needed to not only know everything about it, but also be completely immersed in it. Less than a year later, my mom found an ad in the newspaper – yes, the newspaper – advertising auditions for All-of-us Express Children’s Theatre’s production of “The Elves and the Shoemaker” and “My Name is Rumpelstiltskin”. I had never heard of AECT, and I didn’t know anyone else that had, but I begged my mom to take me anyway. I barely remember the audition process or much of the show anymore, but I do remember being thrilled to sit on the floor of the crowded Frandor space and perform all three of my lines.

We are rapidly approaching my 20th anniversary of that audition, and AECT has completely taken over my life – which, to be honest, took very little time at all. I have taken very little time away over my 20 years, and when I did, it was always very clear that something big was missing from my life. This program in all of its various shapes and sizes over the years, has always meant the world to me. I did all of my growing up here. When I was young, this was the place I could go that made sense. This was where my friends were - this is where my family was. When I think back on my high school years, everything falls into a relation of what show I was working on, not what grade I was in. As I grew to become an outcast at school, I grew to fit in at AECT. (Continued on Page 2)
All-of-us is about to turn 28, meaning that I, and the program, will be the same age for a short time. I’m very proud that it is growing, and continuing to teach and encourage creative thinkers and passionate youth. As the program grows and so do our kids, I’m excited for all of the things we are continuing to offer them. Next season is beautiful, and diverse, and offers two things that are still very new to us. Our kids get to experience a touching and lovely story in Number the Stars, which will be our first time dealing with such serious subject matter – but it’s laced into a true children’s classic. Next summer, we will tackle our first ever licensed musical – something I wasn’t sure we would ever do. Shrek will be an all new challenge for everyone involved, and it will be exciting and fun and so worthwhile.

In the coming years, I hope we, as a family, can tackle more and more challenges and experience more things for the first time. I think it’s so important that our kids are always actively learning while having fun. I hope to always bring something to each season that is a learning opportunity, and something that is huge and fun. Ultimately, it is my goal to keep our kids as passionate about theatre as I was when I was nine years old.
All-of-us Express Youth is Going Gold

By Cynthia Wright-Pratt

Shelby Brewer isn’t busy enough with just being an AECT youth participant she is also a girl scout. Starting in 1916, girl scouts took on unique projects to improve their communities. In achieving these projects, scouts earn a distinguished Gold Award to recognize the extraordinary efforts of young girls.

The Gold Award is earned by following the seven steps below.

1. Identify an issue.
2. Investigate it thoroughly.
3. Get help and build you team.
4. Create a team plan.
5. Present your action plan and gather feedback.
6. Take action.
7. Educate & inspire.

Shelby has chosen a big AECT issue – categorizing and inventorying the costume shop. This is a daunting undertaking as the costume shop is a collection spanning 27 years and has thousands of items. Research and investigation was conducted by Shelby and she discovered a costume software tool called, “Costume Theatre Inventory” that is used by professional theatres.

Shelby recruited her team including AECT helpers, friends and family to tackle this project. A plan of action was developed for the most efficient way to process each item. This plan was discussed with the AECT artistic director and costume helper and feedback was gathered to create the most efficient process.

Through fundraising efforts coordinated by Shelby, she was able to purchase the software and she generously is donating a lap-top computer and the software inventory tool to AECT so that the project is sustainable over time. (Continued on Page 4)

AECT Member Bumper Stickers

The AECT board is offering a member benefit for all members – an AECT bumper sticker! We are so proud of the AECT company that we think everyone should have an AECT bumper sticker on their car. Each member is allowed one free bumper sticker. Additional stickers are available and cost $4.

Bumper stickers and other stickers will also be available for sale in the lobby before, at intermission and after shows.

To collect your free bumper sticker or for additional information contact Katie Brewer at 517-331-4616.
Gold (continued from Page 3)

The team then went into action. Costumes are brought up from the costume shop and a number was sewn in each one. The item is then photographed and the image is uploaded into the costume organization software program. Each item is categorized according to the name, description, time period, fabric, condition, etc. So far the team has categorized 400 costumes and counting.

Part of the project includes creating a communication tool for future costumers to educate them on how to use the software tool. In the future, the costume categorization and inventory process will become part of the guild program so that costumes can be entered into the database as they are created. There are tasks to complete the process that are appropriate for apprentice, journeyman and master costumers.

The costume database is a great addition to AECT and will be very useful. Costumers will be able to easily search through the database to explore options for costuming characters for shows. AECT will also have a record of the amazing costume creations that have been developed over time.

Thank you Shelby for your hard work and commitment to both the girl scout and AECT community. You have made a difference!

Young Playwrights Festival 2016

By Katie Brewer

On Friday, May 27th, 2016 All-of-us-Express Children’s Theatre presented the second annual Young Playwrights Festival at the Hannah Community Center in East Lansing. The playwrights were notified that their plays had been selected in early January 2016 and writer meetings began shortly thereafter.

Three plays were selected. The first play was titled “A Life of Type”. It was written by Audrey Tieman and directed by Ellison Winterstein. The second play was titled “The Steinmetz Pink”. It was written by Ava Brewer and directed by Megan Wesner. The final play was titled “The Elevator at the End of the World”. This play was written by Ellison Winterstein and directed by Shelby Brewer. Both Audrey Tieman and Ava Brewer wrote plays that were selected for last year’s Young Playwrights Festival.

The Festival remained true to the All-of-us Express mission by being produced from beginning to end almost entirely by youth. New to the festival this year was having youth direct two of the plays and have many Master Level Guild Program youth act as crew heads. With reduced rehearsal and crew time the youth involved had to work extra hard to meet deadlines. Several youths were double and triple cast in multiple plays. The All-of-us Express youth were able to put together an entertaining Young Playwrights Festival that resulted in three very different but uniquely amazing and entertaining plays.
AECT Board Notes

AECT Board and the City of East Lansing are Working to Update the Merger Agreement

In 2008, after a downturn in the economy, All of us Express Children’s Theatre and the City of East Lansing entered into discussions and eventually developed a partnership that was detonated in a merger agreement so that AECT would function under the Parks and Recreation Division in the City of East Lansing at the Hannah Community Center.

The AECT nonprofit organization maintained license to the AECT brand and brought staff, supplies, property, volunteers and the program model to the partnership for the program to use.

Since the merger the program has continued to function and grow; benefiting both the City of East Lansing, the AECT nonprofit corporation, and most importantly kids, families and the community at large. Because time has passed and the relationship has evolved, the original merger agreement is no longer reflective of the current partnership in many areas.

As a result, the City and the nonprofit board are meeting to discuss areas for improvement and clarification. These areas include topics such as AECT staffing, space usage, financial clarification, etc. As a result of the discussions, the merger agreement will be updated.

Once updated, the AECT board will vote on whether or not to approve the new agreement. Stay tuned.

New Youth Members Join the All-of-us Express Board

The All-of-us Express board has two positions for youth voting members. Over the past 27 years that AECT has been in existence, many amazing kids have served on the board to make sure that the youth perspective is considered and weighed in the decision-making and planning process. To serve as a youth board representative, a youth must be at least 16 years old.

Morgan Pohl is currently serving in one of the youth positions on the board and has been for the past two years. This August, Morgan turns 18 and at the September annual board meeting, Morgan will be transitioning from a youth board representative to an adult board member. Morgan has been involved with the company over the past 10 years her first show being, “Aesop’s Fables”. All-of-us Express is lucky that Morgan will be attending Michigan State University so that she can continue to be a part of the company and the board.

Shelby Brewer has been serving for the past year as an honorary youth board representative. This August, Shelby will be turning 16 and at that time she will be transitioning from an honorary board member to a voting board member. Shelby has been involved with the company over the past 5 years, her first show being, “Robin Hood” in 2011.

Ellison Winterstein was voted onto the board at the June board meeting as a voting youth member. The board is very excited for the addition of Ellison to the board. Ellison has been involved with AECT over the past three years. He has acted in many shows starting with, “Treasure Island” in 2013, served on many crews and has worked as Assistant Director for four shows. Recently Ellison’s play, “The Elevator at the End of the World” was performed at the AECT 2016 Young Playwright’s Festival.
All-of-us Express Children’s Theatre
Donation Appeal Form

Thank you for supporting All-of-us Express Children’s Theatre donation appeal. Your gift will help ensure that youth participants of all background, cultures, and lifestyles have opportunities to produce professional quality plays, study many aspects of the dramatic arts, and develop valuable life skills while providing outstanding entertainment to the community.

Please consider sponsoring one of the following:

____$25  -  Will sponsor a family of four to attend a show without means to otherwise attend
____$50  -  Will sponsor the cost of tech supplies for one show
____$100  -  Will sponsor a child's participation fees for one show
____$150  -  Will sponsor the cost of advertising for one show
____$200  -  Will sponsor the cost of props for four shows
____$250  -  Will sponsor the cost of costumes for one show
____$500  -  Will help sponsor the cost of royalties for one show
____$1000 - Will help sponsor the cost of the theatre rental for one show run

Name ______________________________________________________________

Address ____________________________________________________________

City _______________________________ State______ Zip_________________

I/We would like our gift to be in honor/memory of: (circle one)

Name: _______________________________________________________________

_____ I/We would like our gift to remain anonymous.

Donations can be mailed to: AECT, P.O. Box 1871, East Lansing, MI 48826-1871

All-of-us Express Children’s Theatre is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Your donation is tax deductible.