

Raton's talent makes Shuler summer season special

By Tim Keller
Special to The Chronicle-News

RATON — With the Shuler Theater's professional summer repertory season now in full swing, the talent pool, as always, is built around Raton's own homegrown talent.

With the Shuler at the heart of downtown for 97 years, and producer Bill Fegan there for half that time, Raton has developed a strong theater scene. Children grow up seeing and participating in local children's productions. Their parents join the cast and crew of community theater productions. Everyone benefits from the many professional touring shows that come to town.

This year's professional summer season, as always, combines visiting actors with several of Raton's own to make up the Kaleidoscope Players.

Artistic director Gail Dixon-Willden couldn't be happier. "Bill and I have a group of locals," she says, "that make up the core of the professional players. Plays and musicals of the summer's magnitude and cast size could not happen without the local talent."

She says Raton has much in common with other towns, but with a difference. "Regional theaters across the country depend on their local talent; ours is just richer than most."

Jillian Trice Solano's upbringing at the Shuler Theater was her springboard to New York City where, following her 2003 graduation from Raton High School, she studied and performed for two years at the American Musical and Dramatic Academy.

An accomplished singer, she performed during her junior and senior years in the all-state high school choir. This is her seventh consecutive summer in repertory at the Shuler, where she's featured as Karin in "Church Basement Ladies," Stephanie in "Web of Murder," and Brighella in the farce "The Servant of Two Masters," which opens this weekend with performances Saturday night and Sunday afternoon.

Performing came early and naturally for Jillian: her mother, Linda Trice, is the piano accompanist for



Each summer, the Shuler Theater's professional repertory season combines visiting actors with several of Raton's own best talents, including (from left) Rick Trice, Wanda Henson, Beki Henson, Jillian Trice Solano, Brenda Ferri and Billy Donati.



The musical comedy "Church Basement Ladies" features Raton's own Brenda Ferri, Jillian Solano and Adrienne Coleman.

the Raton Schools choirs and taught Jillian to play. Father Rick Trice has been active in music performance and theater for 35 years, since his college days at ENMU and for 30 years at the Shuler. The senior loan officer at International

Bank and pastor of Raton's Trinity Fellowship, Rick appears as Pantelone in "The Servant of Two Masters." Another of Raton's stage dynasties is the Henson family, with Clint and Wanda Henson often on the

Shuler stage, sometimes joined by their kids Beki and Toby. Wanda just finished her work for this summer in the part of the mayor's wife (and mob boss) in "Unnecessary Farce," which closed Friday. Beki will remain busy all

summer, though, as the Kaleidoscope Players' properties master. She's in charge of providing — and often creating — every item that the actors use on stage. For "Church Basement Ladies," for example, she made a butter dish, with butter, from wood and paint. When the mayor pulled out a \$16 million check in "Unnecessary Farce," it was her job to make sure he had a check to pull out. Last year Beki performed in a 1960s girl group of singers in the Shuler production of "A Little Shop of Horrors."

The mayor with the \$16 million check was played by Billy Donati, known throughout the region as Billy D, the voice (and owner) of KRTN radio. In a way, he's been at the Shuler Theater as long as Bill Fegan. When Fegan brought a touring production of "Androcles and the Lion" to the Shuler in 1964, 10-year-old Billy Donati was in the audience.

He's spent his life in Raton theater, from the middle school drama club to the Raton Choral Society to the Kaleidoscope Players. He's starred as Tony in "The

Boyfriend," as the butler in "Sound of Music," and Judd in "Oklahoma." He serves as Raton's official city liaison to the Shuler Theater and as president of Shuler Restoration. He frequently serves as technical director for productions and runs sound and lights.

If there's one actor in this summer's company that has spent as much time at the Shuler as Billy Donati, it's Brenda Ferri, who is featured in all four of this season's productions. She began her acting career in the 1986 RHS production of "Once Upon a Mattress."

She continued acting in college but didn't launch into it with passion until she did "Guys and Dolls" at the Shuler in 2007. Since then, she's been a regular, performing in roles such as Aldonza in "Man of La Mancha," Kate, the title character in "The Taming of the Shrew," and Schwartz, the wonderful girl with a lisp in "Putnam County Spelling Bee."

But the role of her life so far is Mavis in this summer's "Church Basement Ladies," where Ferri is given full rein to steal the show. "Mavis is funny, a physical comedian," Ferri says. "I get to be a big goofball and I love it."

Other local members of this summer's Kaleidoscope Players include actors Adrienne Coleman and Janese Little, music director Kelly Jones, dialect coach Kathryn Engel, and stage manager Mariah Fleming. They're joined by many others in various supporting roles such as creating sets, costumes, and programs.

The summer repertory season began June 21 with "Unnecessary Farce."

"Church Basement Ladies" continues July 12, 13, 27 and Aug. 4.

"The Servant of Two Masters" opens Saturday, July 14, and continues July 15, 19, 20, 28 and 29.

"Web of Murder" opens July 21 and continues July 22, 26, and Aug. 2-3.

Sunday matinees are at 2:30 p.m. All other shows are at 7:30 p.m. General admission tickets are available at the door — \$15 for adults, \$13 for seniors, \$5 for children. A book of 10 tickets is available for \$100. For further information, call the Shuler Theater at (575) 445-4746.



Associated Press

Residents begin returning to their homes on Sunday after being evacuated because of the Waldo Canyon fire in Colorado Springs. Many evacuation calls were apparently never delivered to residents.

Thousands of evacuation calls never received, records show

Associated Press

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. — More than 20,000 evacuation calls were never delivered to residents in the path of a wildfire that destroyed about 350 homes around Colorado Springs last month, records show.

It was the second time in five months that Colorado residents said they didn't get calls to pack up and run as flames raced toward their homes.

Officials in El Paso and Teller counties were trying to determine why two-thirds of the 32,000 impacted residents did not receive calls during the Waldo Canyon fire that began on June 23.

Nearly 10,000 attempts

to reach residents in Colorado Springs were abandoned after the calls were not completed, and more than 11,000 calls were not answered, according to records obtained by KMGH-TV.

Cassidian Communications, the reverse notification provider, said some calls were not completed because of heavy volume. Phone company officials said their phones were working fine at the time.

Ben Bills, spokesman for El Paso/Teller County E911, said his agency wants to know why some calls went through and others did not, and he plans meetings to discuss the

problem. Bill Simmons, who lives in Colorado Springs, said Tuesday he never got a warning call because he hasn't registered with the city for such notifications.

Simmons said he left his home because police went through neighborhoods warning people to leave as flames neared the city. His home survived, but his neighbors lost their homes.

"Fortunately I was at home when they came by with bullhorns," he said.

Simmons said agencies that handle emergency phone notifications should send out mail notices telling people how to register.

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dards. "My opinion is that we should just jump to the 2012 code," Vigil said, arguing again that the county should continue to operate under the 2003 code until it is ready to adopt the newest version of the building code.

He was joined in that opinion by Loudon, who asked "Why do we want to stay behind," rather than adopt the latest building code.

Richards brought the issue before the County Commission several weeks ago, arguing that the county needs to update its building code so it is more in line with current standards and what other governments are already doing.

"I'd just like to re-emphasize that the 2009 code is pretty widespread throughout the county already," Richards said Tuesday. "The majority of what I do in the county is already using the 2009 code."

The building inspector has argued that adopting the 2009 building code would get "everyone on the same page."

If the county adopts the change, "all the county from one end to the other will be on the same page with the 2009 code, which makes my job a lot easier," he said.

Richards also explained going from the 2003 code to the 2012 code would be more difficult for everyone, especially considering that

the newest building code is expected to be resisted heavily by contractors because of its tougher requirements on energy efficiency and safety issues.

County Administrator Leslee Fresquez also weighed in on the issue, favoring the change. She said that the county fire marshal, Las Animas County Sheriff James Casias, is planning to ask the commissioners to update the county's fire code standards.

Both Fresquez and Richards noted that the county can't move to the 2009 fire code until it has adopted the 2009 building code.

Further, she noted that the city of Trinidad, which is expected to adopt the 2012 building codes within the next two or three years, may have a harder time than it expects because contractors are expected to argue against many of its provisions.

While Richards is supporting the switch over to try to get the county in line with the city of Trinidad and other governments, Vigil said he would like to see the county try to leap ahead of everyone else and "try to lead everyone else."

"I think it's foolish to go back and adopt something that is already three years old," he said.

"In code years, three years is not a big deal, but to go back to 2003, is,"

Richards said. "I can't ask my contractors to jump from 2003 to 2012," he said. "It's a nasty jump."

Going from the 2003 code to the 2009 one "is not a big stretch for us, because everything being built now is built under the 2009 code," he said.

The Las Animas and Huerfano Counties Health Department appeared before the commission last month supporting the change to the 2009 building code, which includes requirements that buildings with dangerous radon gas levels have dispersal systems.

In addition to adopting the building code itself, Richards is proposing some fee and other changes in his department.

He is proposing to raise the fee for reinspection fees from \$47 per hour to \$50 per hour. The fees were last changed around 2002, he said.

He also wants to change the permit expiration dates. The county's building permits don't now show an expiration date, although Richards said the county policy is that permits are valid for six months and can be extended for two six-month periods.

He is proposing that the permits include the expiration date and be issued for a 12-month period. Permit holders could be granted two six-month extensions.

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