

Raton's summer musical comes chocolate coated

By Tim Keller
Special to The Chronicle-News

RATON — Willy Wonka is coming to Raton this weekend. Not the 1964 Roald Dahl novel, "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory," which arrived at the library almost 50 years ago, nor the 2005 Johnny Depp movie of the same name. Not the 1971 Gene Wilder movie, "Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory," either.

Willy Wonka is coming live to the Shuler Theater in Raton Youth Theater's annual summer musical, "Roald Dahl's Willy Wonka, Jr.," with shows Friday and Saturday nights at 7:30 p.m., plus a Sunday matinee at 2:30 p.m.

Featuring 22 songs and a cast of several dozen children, the production stars 16-year-old Nathan Coleman as the eccentric candy maker Willy Wonka who is looking for an heir to take over his business. He sponsors a contest with five winning Golden Tickets hidden in chocolate bars distributed around the world. Winners get to travel with a parent to tour the chocolate factory; Willy Wonka will choose one to take over the whole operation.

There's big eater Augustus Gloop and his mom, played by Johnny Gentry and Zoë Gomez. There's Veruca Salt and her



Special to The Chronicle-News/Gail Dixon-Willden

Local children dance around Willy Wonka as he distributes candy as the Candy Man, in a Shuler Theater rehearsal for this weekend's Raton Youth Theater Summer Musical, "Roald Dahl's Willy Wonka, Jr." Pictured from left are Spenser Willden as Charlie Bucket, Zeb Medina as James, and Nathan Coleman as Willy Wonka.

mom, played by Clair Willden and Nathaly Torres. There's gum chewer Violet Beauregarde and her mom, played by Ila Raine Medina and Lijah Medina.

There's TV addict Mike Teevee and his mom, played by Meigan Deater and Jacque Alcorn.

Most important, there's Charlie Bucket and his

Grandpa Joe, played by Spenser Willden and Isaiah Duran.

The five children touring the chocolate factory must learn to follow Wonka's

rules — or else.

With musical numbers directed by Bill Crary and accompanied by pianist Carol Simmons, "this scrumdiddlyumptious musi-

cal is guaranteed to delight everyone's sweet tooth." Gail Dixon-Willden directed the action, designed the set and choreographed the show. Costumes for the huge cast were created by Misty Gomez, Kay Medina, Lisa Robertson, Ila Medina, Lori Clark, Maryanne Dailey, Mollie Freeman, Ursula Garcia, and Rosabelle Sneed.

Additional actors in credited roles include Kate Little, Elijah Clark, Laura Robertson, Alexandra Muniz, Christopher Mandonado, Breana Brown, Zeb Medina and Asia Gomez.

Thirty-four more young actors, singers, and dancers join the on-stage fun as assorted squirrels, Candy Man Kids, and Oompa Loompas.

With titles like "I Eat More," "Chew It," "Burping Song," "Think Positive," and "I See It All on TV," the play's 22 songs are packed into a one-act show that lasts 90 minutes.

A treat for all ages, general admission tickets are available at the door — \$10 adults, \$8 seniors, \$5 children. Additional information is available at the Shuler Theater, (575) 445-4746.

New surgery fixes woman's eyesights with telescopic eye

By Michael Booth
Associated Press

DENVER — Doris Ekblad-Olson is not too old to feel childish wonder at the idea of fixing her ailing eyes by letting someone suture in a tiny telescope.

But age does allow her to be blunt about her anxiety as the first Colorado patient to have the pea-size telescope placed in her right eyeball.

"I would rather I was his 100th patient," chuckles Ekblad-Olson, 82, as she discusses the surgery with ophthalmologist Dr. Starck Johnson.

The former teacher was still game to be the Colorado guinea pig, though, and went under Johnson's micro-knives at Sky Ridge Medical Center on July 17. Doctor and patient hope the successfully implanted telescope will bring vision back to eyes dimmed by a severe form of macular degeneration.

"There hasn't been a lot we can do for these patients," Johnson said. "We've been waiting a long time for this to come to fruition."

Johnson assisted on clinical trials of the surgery in Michigan, but implanting the device in Ekblad-Olson's eye will add Colorado to the small handful of sites approved for the procedure. Medicare will pay for people who meet strict criteria for age and condition.

Ekblad-Olson suffers

from "wet" macular degeneration, an end-stage form of the common, chronic disease, where blood vessels are leaking and destroying central vision.

"I can't see the faces of the people across the table from me," she said. "I can't see the food on my plate."

She wants to finish a memoir of teaching seminary in Hong Kong, and being limited to a sliver of peripheral vision makes writing a challenge.

The device, called CentraSight, is placed behind the iris. It projects and enlarges central images onto the still-healthy peripheral portions of the retina.

Over time and with training, Ekblad-Olson's brain will balance the new images with her other, intact eye.

She previously tried a hand-held telescope that has a similar effect and improved her vision by three lines on the traditional eye chart.

"So I'm going to have a 'holy' eye," she cracks, as Johnson began a preparatory procedure.

"That's right," Johnson smiled.

And that's appropriate, she responded, since she believes "God has promised he has my best interests in mind, and all these things will work together."

That faith did not stop her hard-edged questions for Johnson. What's the



Associated Press

Dr. Starck Johnson puts an implantable miniature telescope into Doris Ekblad-Olson's eye so she can overcome macular degeneration, at Sky Ridge Medical Center in Lone Tree, Colo., on July 18.

biggest risk? How long before noticing improvement? Will people notice the implant?

The biggest risk is not achieving as much vision as she had hoped for.

She'll have a good idea of her new vision in about three weeks. Others will notice "a glint" in the mid-

dle of her eye.

Explanations over with, Ekblad-Olson faced a thick pile of consent forms whose blurriness underlined their own purpose. As a friend helped her sign, she never hesitated.

"I'm ready to take what chances I have to improve," she said.

University to offer lower tuition rate for illegal aliens

Associated Press

DENVER — Metropolitan State University of Denver is moving ahead with its new tuition rate for illegal immigrant students.

Former House speaker and Metro trustee Terrance Carroll told The Denver Post that the school is not looking for a fight. But he adds the school is willing and able to defend its decision.

The school's decision in June drew criticism from Republicans who rejected Democrats' legislation this

session to make higher education less expensive for illegal immigrants. Attorney General John Suthers has issued a legal opinion that says the school's decision is "not supported by governing law."

The new tuition rate lets certain illegal immigrants attend college at about \$3,578 per semester, about half the nonresident rate.

Officials say 72 new and 24 returning students have registered under the new rate.

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