



Photo by Merry Celink

As far back as the Romans and Greeks it has been an accepted fact that we can't have art unless the government subsidizes it."

James Aday of the NewMime Circus provided that piece of history in describing the frustration area art groups are feeling now that the Lane County Commissioners and their subcommittee decided to discontinue CETA funding of the arts.

CETA (Comprehensive Employment and Training Act), a federally funded program, is designed to train people for jobs in the private sector.

Requests for CETA funds were denied for many non-profit groups around the area, including all the art groups. Those funds allowed groups to offer their services to the public, train individuals and expand their ranks.

Without those dollars they are struggling to stay afloat.

However, each group has vowed to continue to provide Eugene with the best alternative entertainment possible. In effect, the show will go on.

"We used to be able to perform for free or for about \$100 a show," says Aday. "Now we can only perform where we're assured of getting paid. We're not just talking about reaching out to the public anymore, we are also talking about paying the rent."

Most of the NewMimists are searching

for part-time jobs — jobs that won't interfere with their rehearsal times. Most of the group's help now is volunteer because it doesn't have enough money to pay many salaries.

"Not only does the loss of CETA funding cause us problems of inconvenience, but we must also go out into the public sector and take part-time jobs away from other people in the community that would have gotten them," says Aday.

The Olde Dexter Theatre had to scrap its plans to become a full-fledged Community Center. The NewMime Circus was preparing to help set it up, but Dexter's CETA request for funding was also turned down.

"The impact on this community would have been significant," says Jerry Merritt of the theatre. "Eugene has rarely brought any entertainment out to the rural areas and it is too expensive for people out here to always travel into town for entertainment." Visits to the rural area by art groups undoubtedly will be even more infrequent now.

Like the mimists, Merritt says the theater's main concern now is paying the rent. To meet the costs the group is scheduling dances, renting space and having a bake sale.

The group has lost more than half its members. "We're down to the hardcore addicts now," says Merritt. With CETA funding,

Olde Dexter Theatre had an operating budget of \$62,000 and was reaching the point where it could become self sufficient," Merritt says. "Now that we're starting to do just that, they take the funding away. We're not going to shut down though. We'll still be here — through October at least."

The Lane Regional Arts Council (LRAC) is another group that had its funding requests turned down. LRAC serves as a clearinghouse and an information service for the various art groups of the area.

LRAC's loss of CETA funds amounted to \$43,000. They now operate on \$2,000. Selina Roberts of LRAC says the organization will continue to operate, but not without some major adjustments. LRAC had 16 full-time employees. Roberts says she is now the only paid worker and she works only two days a week.

Volunteer help and work-study students comprise most of LRAC's staff. Besides losing employees, LRAC has had to suspend some services. Visits to the rural communities, like the storyteller who visited Cottage Grove schools, are out of the question now, Roberts says.

Another art group that is scrambling to adjust is the Community Center for

the Performing Arts (CCPA) which operates the WOW Hall as a concert and dance hall for alternative entertainment groups.

Jim Williams, director of CCPA, says they have lost about 30 percent or \$50,000 of their operating budget.

Williams says the Hall will continue to operate with three staff members at reduced salaries. He also says community support to keep the Hall open has been good and that many volunteers have offered their time and donations.

However, CCPA is being forced to cut back on many of its services, such as dance classes, which serve about 150 people a day. They also have cancelled visits by major entertainment acts that were going to perform at the WOW Hall.

"The CETA money allowed us to get out of some pressure and get our administrative act together," Williams says. "We were almost ready to absorb the impact of the loss of funds."

However, Williams claims the CETA withdrawal was a little premature. CCPA has had to dip into its gate receipts just to pay the Hall's rent of \$4,000 a month.

The arts groups agree that the hard times ahead have a built a sense of community between them. All the groups belong to the Arts Alliance where they have been discussing coordinated projects that can be done to ease the money pressures. One such project would turn the WOW Hall's basement into a co-op mailroom.

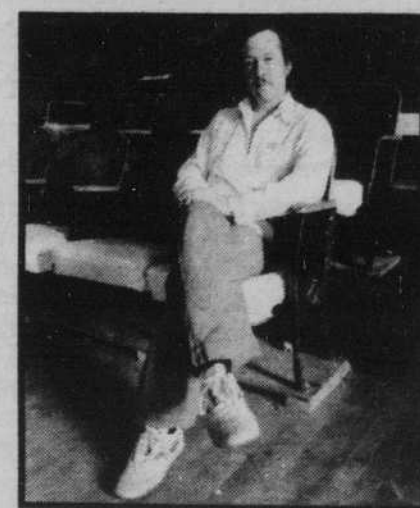


Photo by Patrick Sullivan

Jim Williams says WOW Hall renovations will have to wait... indefinitely.

Despite also having its funding cut, the Oregon Repertory Theatre seems to be flourishing, according to its new producer/director, David Lunney.

"Sure, the loss of the CETA money will hurt and we will have to adjust," Lunney says. "But we kept alternative ways of getting funding." Among ORT's alternative funding sources are private donors, grants from the Oregon Arts Commission, loans from banks and, most recently, a subscription drive.

In fact, ORT is kicking off a massive subscription effort, a first for this area. Their mailing list is approximately 33,000 names long.

Lunney is philosophical about the loss of CETA Money.

"The arts must never allow an outside source like CETA to get that lifehold on it, because when they let that happen they become dependent on it. That outside

source can pull the plug on you at any time.

"Artists as a whole have a large commitment to survive," Lunney continues. "The economic problems of the past will always be there, but ORT isn't stepping down; our audience wouldn't allow us to."

Four Arts groups, ORT, Very Little Theatre, NewMime Circus and LRAC recently collaborated in a theatrical production on the Open Gallery stage.

Jane Van Boskirk, an actress for ORT, who participated in the play says the groups are starting to work together more because of the funding dilemma.

"We want to take the different art groups and use the knowledge and throw it together and see what we get," she says. "We're trying to get as many arts organizations involved as we can."

All the groups are bitter over the method the commissioners and their advisory committee used to eliminate their requests for funding. Charges have ranged from

"politicking" to non-awareness to insensitivity.

ETAC (Employment and Training Advisory Committee) received 550 grant proposals in August. The committee pared down the requests to 330 by how they stacked up to the program's criteria. Each of the 330 were given a priority listing and submitted to the commissioners for their approval.

The commissioners made some revisions in the list — something they said they would not do — and then passed the list 2-1 with commissioner Rust casting the negative vote.

LRAC's Roberts claims it was just a case of the advisory council not being aware of the arts and their significance.

"The arts provide a valuable community service, but the committee tried to evaluate it on the basis of documents. Many of the arts don't have documents," Roberts argues.

The criteria each group had to measure up to included whether the project was rural in nature, the number of employees of the particular project that were hired in the pub-

lic sector after finishing their CETA project and whether the project offered enough public service.

"The WOW Hall serves about 50,000 people a year and the arts subcommittee said our request was turned down because we don't serve enough of the community," Williams says.

Bob Whitaker, director of Lane County's Community Health and Social Services department says the impact of the groups will be "climactic," but will be negligible on the public.

CETA has been a significant employer in the area. The program has funded approximately 3,400 county residents a year and has contributed approximately \$16.5 million to the local economy.

Despite the cuts in services and funds none of the arts groups are ready to quit. Williams may have summed it up best: "We're going to be in for a rough winter, but I think we'll make it."

Story by Richard Seven
Cover by Tom Ettel



Emerald photo

The NewMime Circus' pleas for financial aid fell on deaf ears.

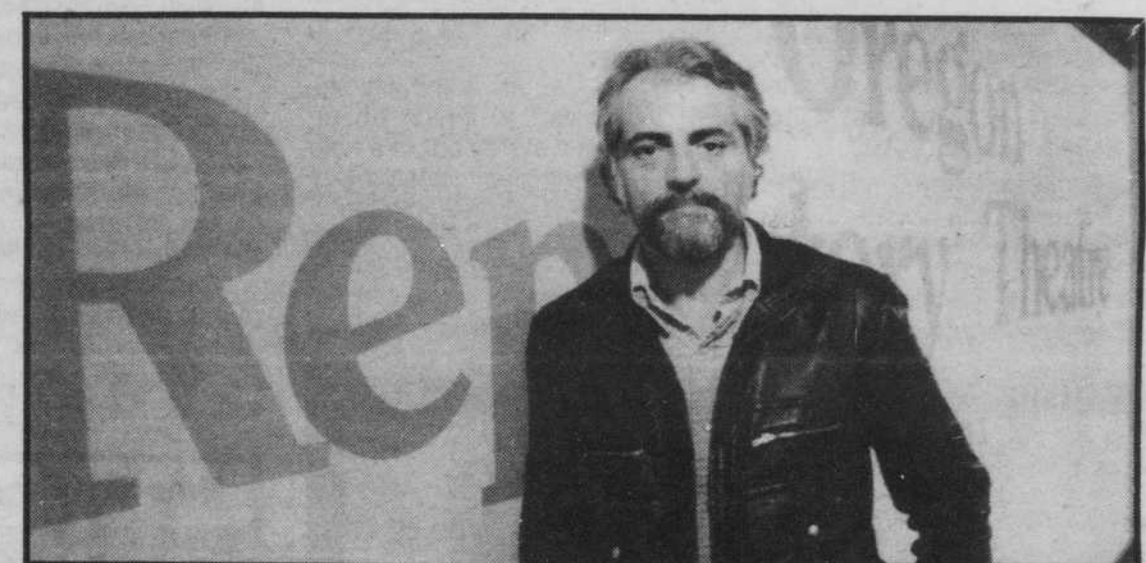


Photo by Patrick Sullivan

David Lunney, producer/director of ORT, says his group was saved from disaster by alternate funding plans.

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