

## Vernonia Community Theater Profiles Part 1: Hands-on Art and Tobie Finzel

*The Vernonia Community Theater (VCT) was formed in 2010 with the intention of bringing the performing arts to Vernonia. The group and their productions involve both youth and adults and provide a creative outlet for members of the Vernonia community to express their artistic talents. In a series of profiles over the next few months leading up to the VCT's third production in the spring of 2012, Vernonia's Voice will visit with several key members that make up the VCT.*

Many people in Vernonia know Tobie Finzel. And if they don't know her, they have probably heard her name. Finzel is the consummate volunteer, a retiree who has devoted much of her free time to finding ways to better her community by giving of her time, energy and talents. Finzel plays key roles and is a board member and an officer for several important groups in and around Vernonia, including but not limited to, Vernonia Cares, the Vernonia Pioneer Museum, the Columbia County Cultural Coalition, the Vernonia Grange and Vernonia Hands-on Art (HOA).

Over the past fourteen years, Hands-on Art has sponsored a variety of activities for children and adults in the Vernonia community including arts camps, a community orchestra, an annual variety show (2004-2009) and Open Mike nights and youth theater productions at the Grange. HOA has also been involved with the Vernonia Pioneer Museum, First Friday, the Junior Salmon Auction, and its newest venture, the Vernonia Community Theater (VCT).

As a non-profit sponsor, HOA often acts as an umbrella for organizations to operate under. Funds, along with bookkeeping are handled through HOA. HOA also provides support for marketing and promotion.

VCT's first official offering was a July 2010 youth production of "Robin

Hood," written and directed by Carol Pelster. Twelve adult volunteers helped the twenty-five young performers learn lines, design and produce the costumes and backdrops, sell tickets, design the posters and programs, and stage two performances to a total audience of 175 enthusiastic patrons.

"I saw some young people really blossom and gain some self-confidence and we capitalized on that for our next VCT production," says Finzel about that initial production.

Finzel, who is currently serving on the Vernonia School District Budget Committee recognizes a need for the community to provide access to arts programs for youth. "Unfortunately when the school has to make cuts, they tend to be in what some people perceive to be the 'non-academics,' but I'm a strong believer in art and music and drama and any kind of creative expression as an important component of a well-rounded education," says Finzel. "So we've tried to supplement what the schools can't always do—though not nearly as much as I would like to."

After having such a good experience with the youth production, VCT staged a second play, "Exposé: Holiday Celebrities Tell All" in December 2010. Directed by Theresa Morris and assisted by another ten adults, some of whom also acted in the play, the cast of twenty high school and adult actors entertained over 150 patrons in three performances. Once again, the beautiful color posters were created by students in Mr. Lower's Digital Arts class at Vernonia High School.

Both production included beautiful sets that were designed and created by volunteers, and some amazing costumes—again designed and created by the production crew.

According to Finzel both VCT productions made enough money to fund a future performance while donat-

ing money to Vernonia School District in appreciation of the use of Washington Grade School facilities.

Finzel, through her work with HOA, has played a pivotal role in helping the VCT become established. Finzel is the Secretary/Treasurer for HOA which gives her an excellent opportunity to really support the arts.

"The arts have always been a passion for me but I never had time, except to go as an attendee," says Finzel. "And one of the things I wanted to do as I eased into retirement was to get involved and support artists. I am not an artist myself, I just really appreciate all the forms of artistic expression and participate to the limited ability that my skills allow."

Finzel has found that opportunity in Vernonia through HOA.

Vernonia Hands-on Art Center was founded in 1997 to provide art therapy for children affected by the 1996 flood. Over the years, HOA programs have evolved to fit the current needs of the community that are in line with its mission to provide a high quality learning environment that celebrates the creative spirit by exposing the community to the arts and honors the community's heritage.

Finzel's back ground in banking as well as computer systems and security gives her the ability to help with the financial end of operating a community group. "With any arts organization, you have a lot of artistic and creative people who don't necessarily have business experience," says Finzel. So there always needs to be someone to keep the books, so that's how I end up serving many boards that I'm on."

Providing a creative outlet, not just for youth, but also for adults is also



important to Finzel. "In Vernonia we have an incredible amount of artistic talent, people that are hidden in the woods who have moved out here because they love the green and the quiet," says Finzel. "Often they are not eager to promote themselves and so having venues that allow people to show their art or be on stage or perform in musical events is a way to provide that type of enriched community."

VCT is planning a third production – this time a comedy with a few musical numbers - for April 2012; the casting call will be issued in January. The theater welcomes all aspiring Thespians adults and youth thirteen and older.

"I so love to watch people's talent bloom or watch people perform who might be hesitant to come forward," says Finzel. "I'm kind of a cheerleader for the arts and enjoy just getting people out there. And we have some enormously talented people in this community."

## CCWRC Receives Grant from The Safeway Foundation

The Columbia County Women's Resource Center (CCWRC) is pleased to announce they are the grateful recipient of a grant of \$2,500 from the Safeway Foundation. The check was presented on November 30, 2011 at the local St Helens Safeway. The funds given

by the Safeway Foundation come from employee's voluntary payroll deductions. 100% of those funds stay locally within the community.

"Thank you to our local Safeway employees and the Foundation," said the CCWRC's Executive Director, Rachel Barry-Dame. "This grant will support CCWRC in providing free, as-needed counseling services and therapeutic art classes

for survivors of domestic and sexual violence.

The Safeway Foundation generously supports local 501©3 non-profits such as CCWRC; CCWRC programs are included in the Health and Human Services priority area. "Safeway is a great partner to help meet needs in our community," said Barry-Dame.

CCWRC is the only agency of its kind dedicated to serving survivors of domestic and sexual violence in our community. For information on how you can help change lives by volunteering or donating to the Resource Center call 503-397-7110.



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