

Former Clackamas student receives Albee honor

Joel Shempert
Staff writer

Jacob Juntunen, a Clackamas alumnus who is currently attending Reed College, has received the rare honor of being accepted for Pulitzer Prize-winner Edward Albee's playwriting class at the University of Houston, Texas. Of the approximately 300 writers who apply yearly for the renowned playwright's class, only 20 are accepted, making Juntunen a member of a select group.

Juntunen is no stranger to such accolades, however. While attending Clackamas last year, his acceptance at Reed College was a testament of both Juntunen's abundant natural talent and of the formidable training and support he received in his years here at the college. He will now continue to build on the wisdom his instructors bestowed upon him.

Juntunen testifies to this, explaining that Sue Mach and her playwriting class were particularly helpful in preparing for Albee's class.

"Alan Widerberg also was very encouraging. He was the one who told me to take Sue's class," says Juntunen. "Also he was very encouraging in the Writers' Club

to all of us. He's a very good guy."

Widerberg, however, throws the praise back in Juntunen's court.

"You've really got to admire his stick-to-it-iveness. He's a talented young man," says Widerberg.

Juntunen has received a lot of training from many instructors in the Clackamas English Department, which helped bring him to this point.

"You've really got to admire his stick-to-it-iveness. He's a talented young man."

~Allen Widerberg
English Instructor

"The creative writing teachers may not have helped me directly [to be accepted in Albee's class], but they certainly improved my writing," affirms Juntunen.

The story of Juntunen's acceptance in Edward Albee's class is interesting and humorous, as Juntunen relates.

"Last winter, during the flood, when Mr. Albee was here [at Clackamas] I attended his playwriting workshop, and I was very impressed. After that I went to his talk, and he mentioned he taught a class in Houston," says Juntunen.

What happened next was the pivotal moment

"Afterwards," Juntunen says, grinning, "I was the obnoxious person in the front row who

said, 'how does one get into your playwriting class?' And he looked at me. He made eye contact. It was one of the most terrifying experiences of my life."

His initiative payed off, however.

"He asked me, 'are you speaking practically or theoretically?' I shook, I quivered and I said, 'practically.' And he said, 'write a play and send it to me. If I like it, you'll be in,'" says Juntunen.

Of course, success did not come effortlessly. It was then he began the long process of writing and revising a play to send to Albee. Sue Mach's playwriting class, which Juntunen took last spring, was instrumental in this.

Seventeen drafts later a play was forged, and the culmination of Juntunen's work came when his play, entitled "Where Hebrus Wanders," was read before Alan Widerberg and the Writers' Club, including Sue Mach, for their reaction.

"I was very worried that they'd be bored, but they weren't. They laughed in the right spots and said, 'aww' in the right spots, and that went very nicely," confides Juntunen.

The play was then ready to send to Albee. After waiting with baited breath for about two weeks, news of his acceptance reached Juntunen's eager ears.

Some adjustment will have to be made in Juntunen's life to ac-

commodate this tremendous opportunity. Having virtually no knowledge of what Albee's class will entail (aside from the obvious), Juntunen will have to approach the experience with a flexible mind set. He is, however, prepared.

"I feel confident, more or less, as a playwright," says Juntunen,

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~Jacob Juntunen
former student

"and a lot of that's because of Sue's class."

Juntunen will making an adjustment of a more concrete nature as well. His attendance in Albee's playwriting class at the University of Houston will necessitate a sabbatical from Reed.

"When I told my advisors and instructors, their question was am I coming back?" relates Juntunen.

There was a concern because, due to their highly challenging courses, Reed College has a high dropout rate. Juntunen reassured them that "Yes, I am coming back."

"I will presumably finish Reed. I suppose if I win a Pulitzer, I might not, but otherwise yes," he adds with a sly smile.

Juntunen sees this as an opportunity both for learning and for finding a direction for his life and talents.

"I had been writing in all the genres and that was getting tiring," Juntunen confides.

He found himself continually starting poems and stories and never finishing them. Now, with a more narrow bent on playwriting, he hopes to be more productive.

"I doubt if I'll stop writing poetry or short stories or whatever. But this at least has, to me, a kind of focus," explains Juntunen.

Juntunen also considers this a career opportunity.

"Having a reference letter [from Edward Albee] could open a lot of theater doors. The hardest part is just getting stuff read a lot of times. ... If you wrote 'Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?' but no one read it, it wouldn't matter," Juntunen observes.

Juntunen's tenacity and persistence, to say nothing of his skill and Clackamas experience, are likely to take him far in the pursuit of his dreams. It is his undaunted spirit which gave him this opportunity in the first place.

"When I asked the question about his class, a lot of people said, 'Why did you ask that?' and thought it was egotistical," Juntunen recalls. "I will admit, I have a slight desire to say 'I told you so,' but more than that, I want to tell people not to listen to discouragement. Just keep trying."

Forensics team has secret weapon

Dan Clark
Staff Writer

When Clackamas speaking guru Brian Everest first transferred to the campus two years ago, he "didn't want anyone to know" he was good at competitive speaking in high school.

Now a cornerstone in the college's division-leading forensics team, Everest has to live with the fact that his name is well-known on the team and throughout the division. He's good, and he can deal with people knowing that.

Everest capped last season, his first at Clackamas, with a trip to the two-year college national tournament. He competed in four events there.

Looking forward to this season,

Everest said, "For nationals, I want to do more for the team. I hope to compete in enough events so the team can receive points in each event."

Still, he admits his events and speeches need work.

"I need to revise a lot of my speeches for the rest of the season. I'm changing a little bit of the style of some of them," said Everest.

What keeps Everest and students like him returning to competitive speaking and the forensics program?

"I'm a real competitive person," Everest explained. "I see someone do something and, if I think that I can do it, I want to do it better. Especially if I see someone do it badly."

The Clackamas Forensics team, guided by competitors like Everest, has soared to first place in its division. The new year brings new tournaments and new ideas to the members of the team.

"I think every speaker is anxious and competitive in their own way," Everest commented.

Everest and the rest of the Clackamas team are not shy about their sport. They are ready to prove their worth at every tournament, no matter how large the competition may be.



Photo by Joel Coreson

Speech competitor Brian Everest has helped the Clackamas forensics team soar to first place this year.

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