

Production Value

Pleasant Hill Community Theatre inspires kids and parents.

It's not surprising that theater-goers in Eugene don't immediately think of Pleasant Hill Community Theatre when considering local productions. But many Pleasant Hill residents don't think of it either, and that's something PHCT board president Michael Stearns would like to change.

"When people come here and the bleachers are in there and it's packed, it's a unique experience," Stearns said. "There's something really funky about this building and it has a unique character to it. Your first reaction is kind of taken aback but then you see the quality of the shows and the people involved."

Most of those people involved, aside from the theater's all-volunteer management and administrative board, are kids. The theater, which first opened in 1991 as Spotlight Theatre, is housed in an old shop building. It became a non-profit in 2000 and four years later experienced a change in leadership, gaining a new identity as Pleasant Hill Community Theatre. The Pleasant Hill school district nixed its theater program due to budget cuts, so now HCT is a vibrant place for elementary through high school age kids to experience live theater.

Like many parents, Stearns got involved because two of his three children wanted to act. "Although we plan on doing more adult performances and different types of activities here, there's no question the focus of this theater is on kids and it will always be that way," said Stearns, who produced the theater's last performance, *A Tall Turkey Tale*. "That was completely unplanned. It started with a few kids coming the first week," he said. "Word got out that we were having a little bit of fun and soon we had a group of 12 kids that were raring to go. Out of that collaboration between myself and these 12 kids we got a script together and we made a play."

The theater operates on a shoestring budget and there's always room for more

people who want to help out or participate. The board plans to open the doors to more lessons, plays, musicals and concerts in the future, in addition to the dance and voice lessons the theater already offers.

The theater's current performance is

Leader of the Pack, a musical about the life of Ellie Greenwich, who wrote numerous popular songs during the '50s and '60s, including "And Then He Kissed Me," "Baby I Love You," "Be My Baby," "Da Doo Ron Ron," and "Do Wah Diddy Diddy." The show features 24 of Greenwich's songs and follows the arc of her life, including her marriage to

Jeff Barry, another prolific songwriter.

Visiting Director Peg Major, who frequently works at the Cottage Theatre in Cottage Grove, will direct the cast of 12 high school students, and calls it a real crowd-pleaser. She's amazed at the level of talent and heart she sees in the kids she works with in Pleasant Hill. "These kids out here probably know more about theater than I did when I was in high school. And I was a theater geek," she said.

The theater received a boost when relatives of Ken Kesey donated money in his memory. The money funded much-needed renovations and imbued the theater with Kesey's inspiring appreciation for the arts. Now, Stearns and the other board members are hoping to raise awareness of the theater in the Pleasant Hill community and beyond. Perhaps Kate Smith, Ken Kesey's granddaughter and frequent actor at PHCT, summed it up best. "The more people that hear about the theater, hopefully more people will come. It can only get better!" **EW**

Pleasant Hill Theatre is located at 35575 Zephyr Way. The show runs April 21-23 and 28-30. \$8/\$6 sen./kids under 12 free. For tickets and more info, log on to www.phct.org. Tickets available at Espresso 58 in Pleasant Hill or at 988-1195.



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Opening Nights

Much Ado About Nothing
Opens Friday, April 14 at
LCC's Blue Door Theatre

Director Judith "Sparky" Roberts brings one of Shakespeare's best-known comedies to life in the LCC production of *Much Ado About Nothing*. The play, which heavily influenced styles, themes and character development in later comedies and even films, uses some of Shakespeare's favorite comedic plays in this tale of love, jealousy and plots gone awry. An Italian landowner hosts two noblemen and their friend and gets more than he bargained for as the friend falls for his daughter while the brothers plot to ruin the courtship. In a hysterical subplot, the landowner's niece engages another character in a witty war of words, while secretly falling in love with him. *Much Ado About Nothing* runs April 14, 15, 22, 23, 28-30 and May 4-6. For info or tickets call 463-5761.