

# Fantastical story of muralist Diego Rivera's childhood presented

Teatro Milagro, Tolovana Arts Colony present bilingual play

By ERICK BENDEL  
EO Media Group

CANNON BEACH — The childhood story of Mexican muralist Diego Rivera gets the fairy-tale treatment in "El Niño Diego," a 40-minute bilingual play that Portland's Teatro Milagro (Miracle Theater) will perform at the Coaster Theatre Playhouse at 7 p.m. Saturday.

"Diego Rivera is one of the most revered Mexican painters in the last couple of centuries," said Lisa Kerr, program coordinator of the Tolovana Arts Colony. People who aren't familiar with Rivera may be familiar with his paintings, she said, "because they've been made into posters 100 times over."

"El Niño Diego" (The Boy Diego) imagines what would have happened if Diego (played by Brian Burger) — who, in real life, was a child prodigy sent to live with a curandera (medicine woman) because of his poor health — had met the Aztec goddess Coatlicue in his youth. The goddess gives the boy a magical paintbrush, which Diego thinks will make him a legendary artist.

When a dastardly art school director (played by Ajai Terrazas-Tripathi) and his dimwitted minion (played by Ana Silva) try to exploit Diego's "magical" talents, Diego's nurse, Antonia, helps Diego realize that he doesn't need magic to make great art.

"In our story, he discovers he doesn't need outside magic," said Alida Wilson-Gunn, the associate artistic director of the Milagro's touring program and director of the Coaster production. "He has the strength inside to create, and that it's not the magical paintbrush at all. It's his own ability that will propel him forward in his career."

## Political themes

Beneath the slapstick and family-friendly fantasy lies a serious political subtext, playwright Dañel Malán said.

The evil school director, Jose Manguino (who, in reality, wasn't evil), is trying to squeeze money from the school's arts program for his private enrichment. The character represents the forces in favor of defunding the arts in public schools, Malán said.

"It's a kids' show, so it doesn't get too heavy with political commentary," Tripathi said.

# Warrenton School Board reprimands one of its own for policy violation

By EDWARD STRATTON  
The Daily Astorian

The Warrenton-Hammond School District Board of Directors voted 5-0-1 to publicly censure Vice Chairwoman Kelly Simonsen at a Monday meeting. Board members Debbie Morrow, Darlene Warren, Joe Talamantez, Brian Bruney and Adam Neahring approved the censure — Simonsen abstained, citing a potential conflict of interest, and board member Isaac Anderson was absent.

The board, said Morrow in a prepared statement, determined that Simonsen failed to refer a complaint about a staff member to the appropriate administrator — Superintendent Mark Jeffery — and instead initiated direct contact with the employee regarding a per-



"El Niño Diego" stars, from left, Ana Silva as the dimwitted Escupir, Ajai Terrazas-Tripathi as the dastardly director Jose Manguino, Brian Burger as young Diego Rivera (seen here endowed with a magical paintbrush) and Elizabeth Romero as Diego's nurse, Antonia.

## IF YOU GO:

**What:** "El Niño Diego" (The boy Diego), performed by the Teatro Milagro (Miracle Theater)

**When:** 7 p.m. Saturday  
**Where:** Coaster Theatre

**Cost:** \$20 per family (which could be any number of individuals), \$5 per individual, or whatever a person can afford. Attendees pay at the door; tickets will not be available ahead of time.

**Story:** The childhood story of Mexican muralist Diego Rivera, done in fairytale style; suitable for children

He added, however, that — in addition to incorporating Rivera's interest in pre-Columbian indigenous culture, mythology and folklore — the play expresses Rivera's philosophy of social equality, that "art should be for all people, as opposed to the bad guy who thinks that art is something to commodify."

"It's very sweet story. It has villains and heroes and goddesses and magic," Wilson-Gunn said. "It's a play written for youth to encourage them to participate in the arts, to make (the arts) more accessible, especially for those who may not have much exposure to the arts."



Kelly Simonsen

sonnel matter, in violation of board policy.

Censure is an official condemnation of a board member or other public official by their peers. It does not remove Simonsen from the school board or impede her ability to serve. She joined the school board July 1, 2007, and her

## Reaching out

Teatro Milagro is coming to Cannon Beach courtesy of the Tolovana Arts Colony, which late last year received two grants — \$3,300 from the Meyer Memorial Trust and \$1,500 from the Clatsop County Cultural Coalition — to pay for the performance.

Kerr, who secured the grants, wants to hold more events that involve the town's Hispanic community and integrate Hispanic art and culture. Money left over from the Meyer Memorial Trust grant will help fund multicultural cooking classes in April, May and June, she said.

"We thought Teatro Milagro was the perfect way to do it because it's a bilingual theater, and that might bring out more of the Hispanic population," she said, adding that, if "El Niño Diego" proves popular in Cannon Beach, the arts colony may arrange for a more adult-themed production in the future.

## Value of art

"El Niño Diego" is written in a way that's called "code-switching," where the dialogue alternates between English and Spanish. "The idea is that, if you were monolingual in either language, you would be able to follow the plot," Wilson-Gunn said.

"We've done several public performances, and the adults seem to enjoy the play as much

as the kids do," said Malán, who co-founded the Milagro Theatre Group with her husband, Jose Eduardo Gonzalez, in 1985.

After the show, the four actors will have a Q-and-A "talk-back" with the audience. Earlier that day, the arts colony is hosting a free acting and mural drawing workshop for kids featuring the Milagro cast from 2:30 to 4:30 p.m. at Tolovana Hall, 3779 S. Hemlock St.

"Kids so seldom have a voice in the arts," Wilson-Gunn said. This is why it's important, she said, to ask children after an artistic experience, "what they felt about it. What did they see? What did they remember? What did it mean to them?"

Malán said she hopes her play conveys the value of art to the children in attendance. "People don't really understand how important the arts are."

# Enterprise zone takes step forward

Astoria would partner with Port, county and Warrenton

By DERRICK DEPLEDGE  
The Daily Astorian

The Astoria City Council gave a tentative nod Monday night toward a new Clatsop enterprise zone that would attract business investment through property tax breaks.

New or expanded businesses would be eligible for property tax exemptions for three to five years. The businesses, in return, would be expected to meet minimum employment levels and job creation goals.

The Clatsop enterprise zone would not alter local zoning regulations.

Astoria would partner with Clatsop County, Warrenton and the Port of Astoria. The City Council's endorsement is key to the collaboration, since the Port could not take full advantage of the enterprise zone unless the city, which controls zoning on a large segment of Port property, is a sponsor.

The City Council is expected to formally approve the enterprise zone in a resolution later this month. The Port, the Clatsop County Board of Commissioners, and the Warrenton City Commission are also expected to back the enterprise zone.

The application is due at the Oregon Business Development Department in April.

City Councilor Drew Herzig said he is dubious about the city partnering with the Port because of contentious disagreements over land use in the past. The Port, for example, had threatened to sue the city over development restrictions in the city's Riverfront Vision Plan.

"I'm really afraid that if we adopt an enterprise zone with the Port of Astoria as a partner we will be forced to keep making more concessions on our zoning," Herzig said.

Jim Knight, who took over as the Port's executive director late last year, sought to reassure the City Council that the Port is interested in collaborating on economic development.

Knight called it a "new day in Astoria. So the days of contentiousness between the Port and the city, under my watch, I'm going to do everything that I can that those days come to an end."

The Clatsop enterprise zone would cover 4.5 miles in total, 1.5 miles in Astoria. The city parcels would include the downtown corridor, the Port and property off Youngs Bay now used by Astoria Ford.

Targeted businesses for an enterprise zone typically include manufacturers, processors, shippers, call centers and headquarter-type facilities. The City Council and the other jurisdictions will likely agree to also allow hotels, motels and destination resorts.

The enterprise zone, if approved by the state, would be managed by Kevin Leahy, the executive director of Clatsop Economic Development Resources.

Some critics have noted that enterprise zones, both in Oregon and across the nation, have had mixed results and have occasionally been derided as examples of corporate welfare. Analysts have often had difficulty in measuring the economic return of the tax incentives.

Leahy said the enterprise zone could be a tool to help the region become more competitive and create more family wage jobs.

"We're all committed to growing our economy here. But we're committed to growing our economy with the right type of industries," he said.

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