

MidValley Theatre looking to cast next performance

Auditions start for 'Oklahoma'

By Steve Tool
Wallowa County Chieftain

The MidValley Theatre Company in Lostine is in need of a few actors for its upcoming production of the 1943 Rodgers and Hammerstein musical "Oklahoma," according to theater director Kate Loftus.

The company has produced plays for Wallowa County residents since 1995. Loftus believes the company enriches the community in a variety of ways.

"Our goal has always been to offer live family entertainment at its best, while at the same time providing an educational atmosphere," Loftus said.

She added that in the past the theater has offered classes in makeup, acting and other dimensions of theater. The company also partners with local organizations, such as Building Healthy Families and Fishtrap.

The play offers 27 speaking roles as well as parts in the men's and women's choruses and an energetic cowboys and ladies dancing group as well as stagehands who can sing with the choruses.

Loftus said while she has

held some auditions, she believes the unusually bitter winter is keeping many citizens from volunteering for play roles. But time is getting short.

"We need many more to fill the cast list," she said. The production is tentatively scheduled for April with rehearsals from late February through April.

She added that cast rehearsals begin in mid-March and will take place on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays by scenes.

"So everyone doesn't have to be there every night until we get to mid-April — after Easter," she said.

Loftus will hand out scripts and music after completion of auditions. She also encourages young people involved in sports to participate and that the company will work to accommodate their schedules.

"We can't do it without you," she said.

The director emphasized that she believes that the process of putting the play together for the stage epitomizes the area's can-do spirit. "Doing Oklahoma just sort of cements the fact that the community works together," she said.

Contact director Kate Loftus at (541) 569-2302 for more information.

Bronze Blues and Brews Festival returns for 2017

Board member takes over director's chair for this season

By Steve Tool
Wallowa County Chieftain

The Bronze Blues and Brews Festival will continue in 2017, thanks to board member Mike Straw, who volunteered at the last minute to take the director's post for one year.

Chuck Garrett, the festival's director for 21 years resigned from the post last November.

The festival takes place during the second weekend of August and after 20 years is one of the county's staple events.

At the time of Garrett's resignation, some board members wanted to take the year off to regroup. Straw was on vacation at the time and knew nothing of Garrett's final decision.

When Straw returned and learned what happened, he and other board members knew the year off would hurt the festival.

It took the event sever-

al years to recover from the time the festival took the 2009 year off.

"There's too many things you lose," Straw said. "Everyone who made a reservation last year has to call up and cancel their reservations, and those places have to find someone else to occupy the rooms, vendors don't get to vend and bands don't get to play."

He also mentioned the loss of grants and donations to area schools that have totaled more than \$50,000 through the years, as well as money streaming into various local businesses.

"We're talking north of 1,500 people who attend each year," Straw said.

Knowing the festival needed a new director, Straw called around and got some interest, but no takers. In the end, everything was in place but the new director. Straw volunteered his services for a year.

"It seemed too good to

let it go," Straw said. "I was around when it began and I've been with it all these years. Many of our volunteers and board were still here and still committed. With all that help, it seemed like it was possible to get things done."

Straw doesn't consider himself a hero for temporarily taking on the position.

"I wouldn't have dreamed of doing it without so many volunteers and board members who have donated so much time and done so much over the years to keep this festival going," he said. "I

couldn't do it without them."

He also thanked Garrett for his years of service.

"It's a lot of work. It's a tremendous burden to carry on top of running your own business, like Chuck did," Straw said.

With the blues train righted on its track, the festival is currently working on recruiting acts for this year's festival, which takes place Aug. 11-12.

"We always need more volunteers, and we'd like to get more younger people involved," Straw said.



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