

COAST LIFE

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A PLACE to call HOME

High hopes as CROW seeks new nest for children's theater program

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Artistic Director and Founder of Children's Repertory of Oregon Workshops Melanie Heard (left) joins board member Polly Fleming in looking through Fleming's cramped closet of costumes. Exclamations of "How did we get three Peter Pans?" and "Where did that come from?" accompanied their search. A new building, which CROW hopes to fund through the community and grants, would allow Fleming to design, store and fit costumes on location.

CYAN MAGENTA YELLOW BLACK

Children's Repertory of Oregon Workshops (CROW) is in the process of launching a large-scale fundraising campaign to create a permanent performing arts facility for youth.

Melanie Heard, artistic director and founder of CROW, has high hopes for the project, which would include purchasing and renovating a building to use for auditions, rehearsals, voice and dance lessons, prop and costume storage and set construction.

"We've located a building already that will meet most of our needs. ... It's fabulous because it has space for the artistic needs that we have such as classes and workshops and summer camps and rehearsals," said Heard.

On Saturday, Jan. 17, there will be an informational meeting at Siuslaw Public Library's Bromley Room to talk about the building project. The meeting will run from 4 to 6 p.m. and also will introduce the upcoming "Share Your Heart" fundraiser, to take place Feb. 13.

Heard said, "People are very supportive of CROW. I think they see the value, which is a good thing."

CROW aspires to obtain \$75,000 in direct donations from the community, and will then apply for matching grants from large local and national foundations.

"We're hoping that this first fundraiser will generate enough community buy-in that we can then go to some of the large foundations that are looking for exactly our kind of project," Heard said.

"This is the first time CROW has ever tried to do anything like this — to raise this amount of money.

So we don't really know how long it's going to take or when this will happen. We would like it to happen soon so we can begin our exciting projects. We have so many cool things planned. The sooner the better, but we're also realistic," she continued.

The community is already a big support to CROW.

"We have a wonderful relationship with the Siuslaw School District," said Heard. "We also have a wonderful partnership with John Flaherty of the Florence Playhouse. He is very generous to the kids and lets us use the Florence Playhouse for the purpose of summer camps."

Heard added, "We are so grateful, but I think it's time for CROW to take the next step and have our own space."

The building would help Heard and CROW benefit the community.

CROW students currently perform portions of their play at senior centers in the area.

"We would like to expand that program. I believe that the kids have a lot to learn from the seniors and the seniors have a lot to learn from the kids. And I think it would be really neat if we set up kind of a program where they could go in more regularly and sing songs and read

Fleming currently makes and stores costumes and props in her home. She uses recycled and "upcycled" clothing and materials to make the costumes by hand. Her request with the new building would be a place to sew and fit costumes. "It would be nice to be able to work on stuff for the current show while there," she said. And in the future, Heard envisions Fleming teaching CROW youth sewing and other life skills. "Absolutely," Fleming said. "I've had friends ask and suggest that. That would be great."

stories and build literacy and engage the seniors," said Heard.

CROW also would like to implement an anti-bullying theatrical program for the middle and high schools. The new building's rehearsal

space would help get the program going.

"Building literacy is important to me. I would like to grow that through the arts," Heard said. "I have a program in mind where children would write stories and we would take several of our older kids and adult actors

into the schools and act out their stories — make them come alive — which will increase the excitement about writing and reading. Those are three things I'm thinking of, and I can't do them from my living room."

Space is the biggest thing CROW seeks with its new building.

Currently, CROW students audition and rehearse at Siuslaw Middle School. Set construction takes place in volunteers' homes and garages. A packed storage unit holds most of the props. Board member Polly Fleming has a full-scale costume shop in her home.

"I have to pull everything out to get to what (I want.) There's stuff under those layers that I totally forgot I have," Fleming said. "It would just be easier. It wouldn't be quite so packed in. If we had an 'under one roof' type space, I could have materials and stuff I was working on down there."

A new space would give CROW more time to focus on the needs of its students.



CROW's "Little Mermaid Jr." cast members wear costumes made by Fleming for last year's show. Its next production, "Once Upon A Mattress," is set to premiere in April at the Florence Events Center. A new space would allow for more rehearsals and prep time.

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