

NATIVITY from page 1A

Parrish has recently commissioned and purchased one piece that fits into this category from a talented local artist.

“Several years ago, I ran into a gentleman named Ralph Martin, who is a woodworker. He lives in Greentrees and I asked him if he could make me a nativity out of myrtle wood,” Parrish said. “He asked me what kind and I said I didn’t care — you pick.”

Time passed and Parrish thought that perhaps Martin had forgotten her piece. Then, about a year later, she received a call.

“It was Ralph, and he said, ‘Your Nativity is ready. Would you like to come and see it?’” recalled Parrish, who was told that the slab of wood used to create the Nativity scene was called Black Heart Myrtle Wood. “It turned out amazing and it is one of my favorites.”

The materials, the colors and the inclusion of animals and other objects in the dozens of different scenes at Florence’s display convey a sense of the nationality or geographical location of the set’s builder. There are depictions of people of color ranging from white to dark brown in the exhibits. There are also different approaches taken by the collection’s owners. Some like to find a special piece to add to their collection, others like to buy them at low prices and then simply give them away.

Michael Simmons doesn’t consider himself a religious person. He is drawn to the design and color elements of the sets

and said he spends part of his spare time looking for sets to display and share.

“I only keep a dozen or so each year and the rest of them I give away. I collect them throughout the year at different garage sales or thrift stores in the off-season when I can pick them up for a few dollars,” he said while unwrapping pieces for this year’s display. “At the end of the festival, I will give away as many as two dozen of these to homes that don’t have a Nativity.”

While delicately placing a piece from one of his 40 or more sets for display, Simmons seemed to light up, then described his plans for later in the holiday season.

“After I get done here, I will take some of these to Shorewood (Senior Living). There are some people there who can’t get out and about, so I’ve got over 40 sets that we are going to put out there for the holidays,” he said. “I will be able to give some more away to residents or family members that don’t have a Nativity scene of their own.”

Parrish has decided to try to cut back on adding to her expansive collection of Nativity sets, although that may be more difficult then she had anticipated.

“I promised myself I was not going to add any new ones this year and I’ve done pretty good so far — I’ve only added four,” she said.

The Florence Nativity Festival began Friday and continues this weekend from 1 to 5 p.m. today and tomorrow, Dec. 2. It is free to the public and there will be musical performances throughout the day.



PHOTOS BY MARK BRENNAN/SIUSLAW NEWS

The Florence Nativity Festival features Nativity scenes from all over the world. The event is open to the public at The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints this weekend.

Players prepare for ‘A Christmas Story’

“Oh, life is like that. Sometimes, at the height of our revelries, when our joy is at its zenith, when all is most right with the world, the most unthinkable disasters descend upon us.”
— Ralphie Parker in “A Christmas Story”



The Last Resort Players invite the community to come back in time to Christmas 1938 in small town America — when kids listened to radio shows, watched cowboy westerns on Saturdays and walked to school for miles in a snow storm.

Rising young actor Shiloh Penrod takes the stage this December as Ralphie Parker in the holiday classic, “A Christmas Story,” with visions of a tacky leg lamp, being blinded by soap poisoning, Scut Farkas (the school bully) and of course, a Red Ryder BB Gun, dancing in his head. Never mind that he has been warned by all the grown-ups “he’ll shoot his eye out;” his Christmas wish is to own that air rifle and he’ll go to great lengths to convince his parents and Santa he should have it.

The story was originally written by humorist, actor and author Jean Shepherd in the 1970s about his childhood in Indiana. In 1983, MGM produced, “A Christmas Story,” which has since become a cult classic during the holiday season.

In 1999, a two-act theater stage production was adapted by Phillip Grecian and the iconic leg lamp continues to glow every year on stage, on television and in our hearts.

For this Last Resort Players stage performance, veteran actor Gary Miller portrays the narrator, Ralph Parker, all grown up, as he retells his memories in fantasy and flourish. He recounts

the days leading up to Christmas and the many events that made this holiday the most memorable of all.

Ralphie’s parents are played by Shawn Penrod as “the Old Man” and lovely Laura Miller as doting Mother Parker. The role of Ralphie’s little brother Randy is played by young comedian and second grader, Jobie Gates. Family resemblance is no coincidence, as Shawn and Shiloh are actually father and son, and Shiloh and Jobie have known each other since Jobie was born.

The show is filled with hysterical and touching moments, from scenes of a tongue stuck to a flagpole to the memory of young Ralphie accidentally uttering “the bad word” in front of his father, who has his own special language of euphemisms. The patient teacher, Miss Shields, is portrayed by Portia Neff, who has fantasies of her students turning in well-written theme papers.

School children that bring the classroom scenes to life are: Joey Haines, Matilda Hand, Vera Blas, Sylvia Hand, Clara Ledbetter and Eleanor Hand. The kids appear in several scenes throughout the show, including the department store “Santaland,” where Schwartz’s baby brother Marley Treyson will also make an appearance.

Adding to the humor and rounding

out the community cast are Grant Hammond, Madelynn Levi, Paul Deemer, Ernie Leone, Michelle Dougherty, Briana Loomis, Sarah Cavallero and Dorland Neale as Santa Claus. They appear throughout the show in various cameo roles.

Behind the scenes, the Last Resort Players production team is comprised of Jennifer Chaney, Cathy Dupont, Portia Neff, Sheri Susee, Dana Rodet, Sabrina Hand, Karylynn Keppol, Paula Ziegelsch, Angela Apodaca, Alysha Atkinson and Matt Miller.

“A Christmas Story” will be performed under the lights on the flat floor at the Florence Events Center on Thursday through Saturday, Dec. 13 to 15, at 7 p.m., with a 2 p.m. matinee performance on Sunday, Dec. 16.

Tickets are limited, so plan for the holidays and buy your tickets now at the FEC box office, online at EventCenter.org or by calling 541-997-1994 between 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday.

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