

NORTH POLE ROMANCE BRINGS 'JOY' TO THE WORLD

It doesn't start when the stores put out their holiday wares nor when cut fir trees arrive at city lots, nor when TV regales viewers with holiday concerts, tree lightings and movies like "Miracle on 34th Street" and "It's a Wonderful Life."

It's not any of those albeit splendid activities that starts the Christmas season in Florence, "where the river meets the sea." What does start the season is the annual Holly Jolly Follies at the Florence Events Center, 715 Quince St. This year, the show plays Friday, Saturday and Sunday, Dec. 6, 7 and 8. Visit www.eventcenter.org for tickets.

The Follies is a big, shiny package Florence gives to itself every year. Comprised of participants of all ages indulging in their best performances and full houses of spectators applauding heartily, the Follies is a community event, a party full of joy.

That brings us to this year's event. The Follies have always been a variety show, but in recent years, themes have emerged, dramas with familiar characters interspersed between the acts. The story angle came from the creative mind of accomplished writer Rose Ellen Jacobson, who has an affinity for delightful characters and sparkling dialogue. Santa's elves have served her well in the past, and once again the story returns to the North Pole. This year's title is "Finding Joy at Christmastime."

The holidays can be a lonely time with no one to share them with. Sarge Elf (Mike Smith), who's in charge of all the elves, is sad and lonely and yearns for a girlfriend. Sparkle (Zhade Beers), the littlest elf, is determined to fix him up. Sarge's eyes light up when he sees Joy Merriweather (Polly Coleman), manager of the candy factory, and she seems to fancy him. But both are shy, and Sparkle has her work cut out.

Sarge gets an edge when he learns there is trouble in the candy factory. Gertrude, the original candy cane twisting machine, has got a screw loose. When Sarge offers to fix it, Joy insists Bob McCormack will take care of it. But Bob lives in Georgia, is very old, and might be dead. Alas, Bob has passed, but his daughter claims that Bob saved the part that would fix Gertrude, and Dasher, Santa's fastest reindeer, is tasked to fly to Georgia and

Christmas party planned for special needs families

Florence Families Support Group is again partnering with The Arc of Lane County Families Connected to bring the Tree of Joy Christmas Party to families of Florence with special needs children.

The party will be held Wednesday, Dec. 18, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. at the Florence Elks Lodge #1858, 1686 12th St.

The holiday party provides dinner and presents for local families.

The Tree of Joy Christmas Party gives the opportunity for Florence-area families to share in the experience of a community holiday party in a sensory safe environment.

The holiday party will provide a comfortable space in a social setting. It will include dinner, presents for the kids, arts and crafts and even Santa, who will make an appearance. The overall goal is to bring families together outside of their homes to enjoy fun, accessible community events.

Organizers are looking for donations from local companies within the Florence community to help make this a successful event. Currently, there are two gift cans at Fred Meyer, where people can drop off gifts, and a donation jar at the front desk of Bi-Mart.

For information regarding Families Connected or the Florence holiday party, contact Nancy Berge at 541-606-9061.

Review of Holly Jolly Follies

By Burney Garelick
Special to the Siuslaw News



"Sparkle the Elf," played by Zhade Beers, encourages "Sarge" (Mike Smith) to "Find Joy at Christmastime" in this year's Holly Jolly Follies.

retrieve the part, and all is well because you can't have Christmas without candy canes.

But Sarge is reluctant to approach Joy. The nurturing elves, including Elfis (Ned Hickson), give him confidence by teaching him to dance, and very soon Sarge and Joy get together, and everyone is happy.

As a matter of fact, according to Jacobson, there really was a Bob McCormack. In 1919, a hundred years ago, he started McCormack's Famous Candy Co. in Albany, Georgia, and started selling candy canes. The company was known as the largest manufacturer of striped candy in the world. The candy-shaping process was labor intensive until Bob's brother-in-law, Father Gregory Keller, invented a machine in 1952 to twist soft candy into spirals and cut stick candy, and in 1957 another machine to put the crook in the candy cane. Fact and fic-

tion sometimes make sweet dance partners.

The Sarge and Joy romance evolves among terrific acts of song and dance, starting with "Mr. Santa," a line dance to a recording of "Mr. Sandman" with altered lyrics. Other dances include ballet, a very clever "Yo Ho Ho Christmas Rap," contemporary, tap, and the Flight Dance Team that commingles all styles into a unique bouquet. Exotic performances include belly dancer Jennifer Marus and aerialist Sally Brewer, who performs a silks solo.

Rhianna Haines and Marty Adams, two members of the fine pit band, take to the stage to tickle the ivories with dueling holiday pianos.

Splendid songs include a charming arrangement of "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" and "Wonderful World," a duet by Denise Dee and Mike Jacobson; "Something

About December," duet by Maree Beers and her sparkling daughter, Zhade; "Breath of Heaven" by Kim Clements; "In My Daughter's Eyes," a duet by Tamara and Haylee Cole; "Christmas Isn't Christmas Without You" by Nancy Pearson; and "Christmas Will You Stay?" by Melanie Heard, daughter of Rose Ellen and Mike Jacobson and director of the show.

A fourth member of the Jacobson family in the show is Heard's daughter Sabrina, age six, who reads a letter to Santa.

Needless to say, the Follies is a family affair, with parents and children treading the boards together, including the fabulous Tutu Dads, big burly tattooed men in tutus and work boots pirouetting across the stage, all with kids in the cast.

Other comedy includes the inimitable, incorrigible David and Rosemary Lauria as the Candy Cane Polishing Crew; an insurance commercial parody; and "Pass It Down," a very funny movie theater skit.

So there you have it. Thanks to the Holly Jolly Fol-

lies, Christmastime is here, by do it where the river meets golly, and disapproval would the sea. It makes for a very merry Christmas season.

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Thanks to all who made the Florence 13th annual Veteran's Day Parade a success! The Florence Veteran's Day Parade Committee would like to thank all participants in the parade. Many people viewed the a parade to support our Grand Marshalls, World War II veterans. Florence has a large group of veterans, and the parade is a salute to all who have served our great nation.

Many volunteer and many hours went into the success of the parade & we were blessed with good weather!

Without the help of the following sponsors, this parade would not succeed:

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God Bless all who have served, especially people who gave their all for our great nation to be free.