

Resident spins magic for local theatres' costume departments

BY CAITLYN MAY
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As a child, Rhonda Turnquist was in one of two places; her father's wood shop or her mother's sewing space. Decades later,

she's used the skills she learned in the wood shop to build her own sewing room and she's lending her talents to the Cottage Grove Theatre to spin costumes fit for Broadway.

"I've sewed for as long as I can remember," Turnquist said. "If I wasn't sewing costumes, I would be sewing for myself. When I don't have anything to sew for the theatre I come in here and make something else."

"Here" is a small cottage on her property, currently under construction by Turnquist herself. The newest room will house fabrics and sit just outside the main sewing room, which Turnquist also built. Fabrics sit folded in piles as high as the shelf they're housed on while thread and bobbins and sewing notions line the walls, all guarded by Muffin; a 15-year-old cat who spends her days lounging in the sewing house.

"She's a little old lady like me, and we get along fine," Turnquist said.

The friendly relationship may be in part to the time the two spend together. During particularly involved shows, Turnquist says she can 10 to 12 hours a day sewing, six days a week for up to five weeks at a time.

"I take one day off. And that's to go shopping," Turnquist said.

She has her favorite haunts that consist strictly of second-hand stores though she does "cheat" occasionally and order bulk fabric from Amazon.

The result of her shopping excursions and 12 hour days is nothing short of miraculous.

"I had a woman ask, 'Where did you get the costumes?' and they told her I made them," Turnquist said. "She said, 'No, I



know she's your costume person but where did you get them?" Turnquist's costumes are often the talk of the productions but behind-the-scenes garners an interesting look into their construction. A pair of boots used during the production of "Hamlet," passed for the real thing. However, Turnquist said the shoes were made of felt booties, strips of fabric and spray-painted googly eyes stood in for the rivets. All of Turnquist's costumes have the same "make it work" component stitched in. The majority of the elaborate ball gowns wowing crowds at the Cottage Grove Theatre are made out of curtains and lined with old bed sheets. She has used place mats to embellish some pieces and shower curtains to add character to others. "The average cost of a full gown, I would say, could be \$30 or \$40 dollars. But that's all of the material," Turnquist said. When she's not at the theatre, Turnquist oftentimes brings her work home. The theatre has a washing machine and dryer but Turnquist says there are some days her husband ends up doing a pile of costume laundry. While most people would dread the ironing and folding to come after, Turnquist says there is no "least favorite" part of sewing and creating costumes. And while she does not sew for private individuals, her grown daughters often end up with Halloween costumes more fit for a production than a stroll down the block to collect candy. "I'll give my daughter IOU gifts and she'll turn them in for a costume," she said. "One year, she and her husband were the leads from 'Mary Poppins.'" She is currently scheduled to work on four of the six shows premiering at the theatre this season and looks forward to the packed schedule. It's a shift from her decades of teaching but she says volunteering at the theatre eased her transition into retirement. "I used to cry because I didn't know what I would do," she said. "I was helping on 'Beauty and the Beast' one summer and the start of school came and went and I said, 'Oh, I don't miss it.' So, I've been doing this ever since."

Town clears out homeless camp

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A homeless camp established under the Main St. Bridge has been cleared, according to Cottage Grove City Manager Richard Meyers.

According to the city, the camp had been in place for "sometime" as it was not readily visible from the street. Cottage Grove Police Chief Scott Shepherd said the department responds to notifications of transient camps immediately when they are brought to the department's attention.

"When there are transient camps that are on public property we try to make contact with whoever might be using the area and advise them of trespass and give them 24 hours," Shepherd said.

Once individuals using the camp are notified, they have 24 hours to vacate the area. Any valuable items left behind are collected by the CGPD and held for 30 days. If no one claims the items after a month, they are disposed of.

The camp under Main St. Bridge was reportedly full of typical camp items according to the city. A statement on the camp noted, "There was the usual trash, blankets, garbage, food waste, metals, and human waste."

The area was not accessible to equipment, forcing Northwest Hazmat to perform the clean-up by hand at a cost to the city of Cottage Grove.

Shepherd said the department tries to patrol areas it knows are used for shelter by homeless individuals including the underside of bridges and empty fields. Once a camp is cleared out, the department will make regular patrols of the area to prevent the camp from being re-established.

"If there is someone who's been advised before (of trespassing) they might receive a citation for trespass," Shepherd said. "If we tell them

multiple times and they're not doing anything to change their situation we can even take them into physical custody and charge them."

Affordable housing in the state of Oregon continues to be an issue with several cities around the state citing a lack of inventory, stagnant wages and slow turnover as key issues in the growing problem.

2016 data from the Annual Homeless Assessment Report noted that Oregon's homeless population faces particular circumstances when it comes to housing. 59.1 percent of the state's homeless reported sleeping in cars or on the street, unable to find shelter.

It's a problem that has plagued Cottage Grove. Recent efforts to construct a "tiny house village" were met with hesitation from the immediate community but supported by multiple community organizations dedicated to answer the question of affordable housing in the area.

EXHIBIT 1.8: States with the Highest and Lowest Rates of Unsheltered Homeless People 2016

Highest Rates				
CALIFORNIA 66.4% 118,142 Homeless 78,390 Unsheltered	OREGON 60.5% 13,238 Homeless 8,002 Unsheltered	HAWAII 54.4% 7,921 Homeless 4,308 Unsheltered	NEVADA 53.1% 7,398 Homeless 3,927 Unsheltered	MISSISSIPPI 48.9% 1,738 Homeless 849 Unsheltered
Lowest Rates				
RHODE ISLAND 3.2% 1,160 Homeless 37 Unsheltered	NEBRASKA 3.7% 2,754 Homeless 101 Unsheltered	DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA 3.8% 8,350 Homeless 318 Unsheltered	MASSACHUSETTS 3.9% 19,608 Homeless 760 Unsheltered	NEW YORK 4.2% 86,352 Homeless 3,591 Unsheltered

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