



Performers read during the one-act play "We Are Neighbors" on Saturday at the First Presbyterian Church.

Stories from A1

Alliance of Lane County (CALC) and the Minority Voices Theater.

Both plays are modern adaptations of CALC's 20-year-old "We Are Neighbors" project, which told the stories of local immigrants through stage play, photography exhibition and quilting.

While the general narrative has remained, the new version has been modified to reflect modern issues in the national discussion about immigration.

"New things have happened since then," said Marion Malcom, CALC member and a performer last Saturday's show. "All the stories in this play are based on interviews with people that we know, so there's a whole lot of authenticity."

Stories were collected from interviews of members of marginalized groups including Muslims, undocumented immigrants, DREAMers (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors) and Syrian refugees living in the Eugene-Springfield area.

The touring version has been performed more than 30 times since its inception two years ago, Malcom said.

The story is set at the 21st birthday party for Elena as she is surrounded by friends and neighbors with diverse backgrounds.

As the celebration begins, characters share stories about their immigration and integration into the United States.

Many of the characters experienced hurdles such as grappling with language barriers and facing discrimination for not speaking English.

Some characters fled their homes to come to the U.S., like Miss Schormüller, a teacher, who escaped the Holocaust as a little girl.

"Even though I came to the U.S. as a child, it took me long time to feel close to anybody," she said.

Ming Ping, an immigrant from China, discusses the crackdown on political dissent by the Chinese government and her subsequent decision to leave the country.

Palestinian character Ashim came to the U.S. to escape Israeli occupation and start a series of restaurants, only to be the target of attacks when racial tensions flared.

Syrian refugee Khalil ran away from mandatory military service, taking with him only a small bag. Unable to find work in Turkey, he applied for refugee status and was eventually sponsored by someone in the U.S.

After landing in Los Angeles, he found out that his sister and brother-in-law were killed the night before by ISIS.

While the characters talk, a DREAMer's mother, who is supposed to bring the cake, is noticed to be suspiciously absent and it's feared she has been taken by Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

After reflecting on how difficult pathways to citizenship can be, the characters state how their lives have become rooted in the U.S. and how they hope everyone can learn to respect

differences and recognize similarities.

The show ends on a note of hope from Elena: "May all beings be free from suffering. May all beings experience a deep sense of belonging. May all beings find true happiness and everlasting peace."

A discussion with the audience and cast followed the performance. Audience members shared experiences of people they know who have endured immigration-related hardships.

Guanghong Atman, who played Ming Ping in the play, had participated in the older version of play years earlier.

"I never expected that 20 years later this play is still so relevant," she said, "and it is imperative that we share that with each other and know our roots, not only in the physical and hereditary sense, but also our roots of our shared humanity."

Saturday's performance marked the first time Cottage Grove had hosted the play, owing in part to efforts of the Earth and Social Justice Committee of First Presbyterian Church.

"The church is very interested in immigration issues and helping serve the

immigrant population and the refugee community," said Karen Hill, pastor of First Presbyterian Church. "So anything we can do to help tell the story and make sure this is a welcoming place, we want to be a part of that."

Malcolm hopes for the play to have impact on the way marginalized groups are perceived within the community.

"It's very important for them to be seen as people with agency — people who are resilient and resistant and not simply people who are victims of some terrible circumstance," she said. "These are brave, resilient people who have a lot to offer and who do offer a lot to our community."

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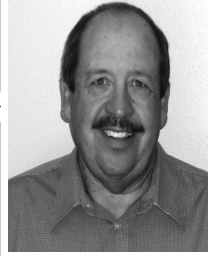
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Tall grass and hazardous vegetation includes: wild blackberry bushes, weeds & grass more than 12 inches tall anywhere on your property, including public lands out to the street. Vegetation that is likely to endanger buildings or other property should it catch on fire must also be cut or removed.

During the fire season inspections will be made and property owners notified that they must cut or remove the hazardous vegetation. Failure to cut or remove the grass or vegetation will result in the City having to abate the problem. The cost of abatement will be charged to the property and if unpaid will become a lien against the property.

Property owners are reminded that they must keep hazardous vegetation and tall grass cut less than 12 inches until **November 1st**. Questions can be answered by the Public Works & Development Department at City Hall, by calling 541-942-3340 or by email: planning@cottagegrove.org.