

Volume II Issue 3
July, 2019

www.MontanaPlaywrights.org



MPN News

The official newsletter of the Montana Playwrights Network

2019 MPN QUEEN CITY ROUNDUP OF COWBOY POETS, PLAYWRIGHTS & STORYTELLERS



Workshop attendees



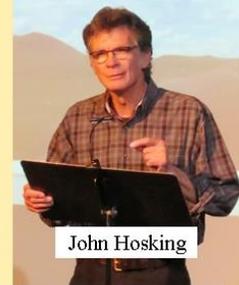
Gwen Petersen



Margaret Wilhelm
Jim Hamilton



Terri Atwood



John Hosking



Mike Jetty



Sapphire
Ferguson Jetty



Judy Williams & Carla Ahern
"The Divine Bovines"



Audience wearing cow ears watching
"The Divine Bovines"



Pamela Mencher

Queen City Roundup for Cowboy Poets,
Playwrights & Storytellers
**Marrying Cowboy Poetry
& Playwriting**
April 26, 2019 at 12:30 pm
Helena College
Presented by
Pamela Jamruszka Mencher, Gwen Petersen



Pamela Mencher

Greetings from the President

Hello, everyone! I am happy to announce that 2019 has been a busy and productive year thus far. We offered the unique Queen City Roundup of Cowboy Poets, Playwrights & Storytellers on April 26 & 27 in Helena. For this well-received event, we were blessed with *sponsorships from Humanities Montana, the Montana Arts Council, Opportunity Bank, and Slate Architecture*; and also received support via advertising in our event program from businesses: *MT Perio & Implants, Montana City Bank, and PayneWest Insurance* of Helena. The pictures on the front page of this issue tell the story of this unusual and exciting undertaking. To read the events program, please find it under the Past Events tab on our website soon. All in all, it was fabulous, challenging, entertaining and inspiring for all attendees. And, last but not least, special thanks are extended to volunteers who helped to produce it; Pearl Allen, Jane Ogle, Janice Jamruszka-Wilson, Robert Holter, Julie Burrows, Ange Furlong, Helena High's Thespian Guild and stage technicians, as well as our wonderful performers and presenters, Gwen Petersen, Margaret Wilhelm, Jim Hamilton, Mike Jetty, Terri Atwood, Sapphire Ferguson Jetty, Judy Williams and Carla Ahern, and all our other talented actors in the Friday night performance on April 26.

We are also thrilled to announce that we received our building permits from the City of Helena, and will begin renovation of the Helena Avenue Theatre, MPN's new home! Slate Architecture and Pentecost Construction are overseeing the work. Completion is projected for November 1, with a gala opening scheduled soon thereafter. We'll send out more details in our next newsletter, so stay tuned!

Other highlights in this issue feature stories about theatre companies and MPN members from around our great State of Montana, and an update on the 2019 MPN Montana Premiere Project on page 3. We also welcome our newest organizational member, the Judith Mountain Players of Lewistown!

And, don't forget to submit your stories, plays, poems or memoirs about Montana for our 2020 publication project. See details on the last page of this issue or on the website at: www.MontanaPlaywrights.org.

MPN 2019 Montana Premiere Project

This event is the first of what we hope becomes an every-other-year project of the Montana Playwrights Network. The purpose of the MPN Premiere Project is to provide opportunities for playwrights to receive a fully realized production of their original scripts.

For this first go-around, we put out a call for plays in 2018, and both one-acts and full-length plays were submitted by MPN members. These "blind" submissions were forwarded to three producing groups, who then selected either a collection of one-acts as a single production, or chose a full-length play from the many outstanding original scripts. Many thanks to our members for submitting their works for consideration, and to three theatre companies for being a part of this first-ever, 2019 MPN Montana Premiere Project!



The Vorbit Incident

A Full-length Play
By Jay Kettering

October 11, 12, 17-19, 24-26,
2019



The Poppoviches

A Full-length Comedy
By Leah Joki

November 14, 15, 16, 21,
22, 23, 2019

"Plumb Local": A Collection of One-Act Plays



Jay Kettering's *Flotsam, Jetsam, and Bill*
Pamela Mencher's *Montana Fish Story*
Cynthia Webb's *Driver's Ed*

December 6, 7, 8, 13, 14, 15, 2019

MPN News From Around Montana

Meet the Montana Actors' Theatre in Havre!



While the regular season just concluded with the Montana Actors' Theatre first "Ren Faire" accompanied by a full production of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, theatre is still in full swing in North Central Montana. Every year, four college interns arrive in Havre to run KidsMAT, a series of children's workshops across the Hi-Line region. In these workshops, the kids participate in every aspect of the production culminating in a public performance at the end of the week. This year, Rory Everingham and Austin Nelson from Havre, Kira Mills from Conrad and Samantha Haan from Billings take on this challenging program. In addition to the theatre camps, the interns also cast, direct and produce a youth production for public performance. This summer, *She Kills Monsters* opens July 25th and runs through August 3rd. The show features middle and high school students and will be a full production with interns and cast taking on everything from set construction to lighting design to directing. The entire summer program is sponsored by many local entities as well as by the Washington Foundation, the Montana Arts Council and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Jay Pyette
Executive Artistic Director
Montana Actors Theatre

MPN Regional Representative
Northern Highlands



MPN News From Around Montana

Meet the Ellen Theatre in Bozeman!

The Ellen's story began in 1919 on Main Street in Bozeman, a town of 6,000 residents. Fred Willson, a renowned architect, designed the theatre and Ellen's two sons built it as a tribute to their mother, Ellen Trent, for whom the theatre was named.

In the early years, the Ellen hosted variety shows, famous vaudeville actors, silent movies, school plays, and town band and opera performances. After World War II, the grand dame of Bozeman public performance began to decline and the Ellen seemed doomed to end her days as a run-down movie theater.

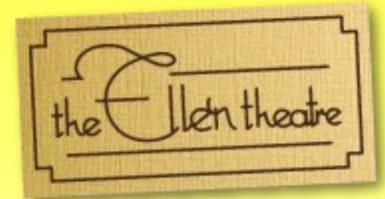
Along came Montana TheatreWorks, a theatrical performance troupe in search of a home. With much hard work and constant fundraising, TheatreWorks guided by Executive Director, John Ludin, successfully crafted the purchase of the Ellen Theatre in 2005 and began the renovation. She reopened in December of 2008 with a production of Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol which 6,000 people attended. To date, over 370,000 patrons have enjoyed a wide variety of entertainment, from local performers to world-renowned talent.

Then and now, the Ellen is the heart of the Bozeman social scene. In 2008, the Ellen hosted 54 events. This year she celebrated over 200 events; PechaKucha Nights, film festivals and special showings like MSU film and television student projects, a venue for birthday, engagement, wedding and anniversary celebrations and of course live theatre, ballet and orchestra performances. The Ellen is also the site of the TaTE Academy, offering classes for youth and adults.

John Ludin, Executive Director at Montana TheatreWorks and of the Ellen Theatre, started Montana TheatreWorks in 1995, persevered with the purchase and renovation of the Ellen, and has shepherded the growth of the theatre since 2005. He is quick to say that the restoration of the Ellen to full glory has been a community project, requiring hard work on the parts of many people. He constantly reminds himself and the staff to never lose sight of the Ellen's mission to promote quality entertainment at an affordable cost. He loves being in back of the theatre and hearing the people comment on the performances. Their laughter during the comedy shows is especially gratifying.

Ludin has done it all, from television writing, to theatre company building, and producing and directing shows. He wouldn't trade his experiences of the past 25 years for anything. He isn't interested in moving on; rather, moving forward.

So, what's the next chapter for John Ludin? Recognizing that theatre is a medium that relies on interaction in order to create, he'd like to promote writers and support groups for writers. He himself has written several plays that have been performed at the Ellen. Sounds like John, TheatreWorks and the Ellen will be around for a long time.



Written by Janice Jamruszka-Wilson, based upon an interview with John Ludin, June, 2019
Secretary, Montana Playwrights Network

MPN News From Around Montana

Meet the Judith Mountain Players in Lewistown!



The Judith Mountain Players is a community theatre company in Lewistown that has an illustrious history. Originally started in the early 1900's by local theatre enthusiasts and revived in the 1950's by local writers, the company flourished through the 1970's producing plays, poetry and musicals focused on local history and themes in a variety of spaces.

According to current Board member and play director, Elisabeth Martell, the company vanished until 2014 when a new group of theatre enthusiasts revitalized the troupe. They renewed the 501(c)(3) non-profit status and created a ten-member Board of Directors with Clay Dunlap as President, Irene Hrubes as Vice President and Tom Wotjowick as Secretary/Treasurer. Future plans include developing local writers and present cowboy poetry, local museum material, and familiar well-known plays and musicals; material that is easily shared and easily described for audiences. They also plan on participating in a 48 hour theatre festival that would involve playwrights, actors, directors and designers from the Lewistown community and also others from around Montana. Ultimately the group wants to develop the theatre to help their community grow and thrive. They see themselves as an arts incubator that attracts all ages of people who will enjoy exploring their creative sides and getting to know each other in the process. The company byline is, "Come Play With Us!" to encourage participation and interest.

The big news for the Judith Mountain Players is their recent acquisition of a home for their productions, classes and other special events. The Lewistown Senior Citizens Club decided a few months ago to gift their building on Barnes Street to the Players which already includes a stage and performing space; and with some strategic renovation, the Players will eventually upgrade it into a fully equipped performance and theatre education facility. The seniors will continue to hold card games and occasional dances that are popular with the locals but wanted the building to be owned and run by a community organization, as their own group has aged and slowly reduced their membership in the last decade.

Elisabeth Martell and her immediate and extended family all moved to Lewistown in 2014 from central Illinois after her parents found the city to be a perfect place to live. Elisabeth, along with her husband, four children and her sister transplanted to Lewistown and immediately settled in. Her husband is a machine operator, her mother and sister are lab technicians at the local hospital, her father is an electrical supervisor, and Elisabeth is the CEO for the local chapter of the Boys and Girls Club. Along with her "day job", Elisabeth also directs most of the Judith Mountain Players' shows and works with the Board of Directors in running the company. They recently completed a production of *Charlotte's Web*. Last year the group hired a director from Missoula who produced "Our Town" with the local high school students. After they finish renovating the senior center, they hope to offer a show or other live performance event each month, along with children's theatre camps, fundraisers and other special events. The Judith Mountain Players are the newest theatre company to join the Montana Playwrights Network, and we look forward to more great news from this up and coming theatre company in the future.

Written by Pamela Mencher, based upon an interview with Elisabeth Martell, June, 2019.



"Charlotte's Web"

MPN News From Around Montana

Meet the No-Joke Theater and Leah Joki!

TOO BUSY FOR WORDS

How did it happen that at the age of sixty-three, I am busier than ever? I am not a hundred percent sure, but... be careful what you ask for. Sometimes, you actually get it.

I had a long career working as a teacher and Artist Facilitator for the California Department of Corrections. In 2017, a Warden and the William James Association, asked me to start my own theater program in a troubled maximum-security prison in Los Angeles County. I came up with a name for my program at the last minute (No Joke Theater) and actually got what I asked for... two years of funding for a team of eight teachers.

I spend two months at a time in the desert working with adult men, twenty-five to lifers. I offer them a complete theatrical experience. I teach them acting, playwriting, directing, stage management and design by using classical, contemporary and original material from which the participants learn responsibility, communication skills, empathy and the desire to live life differently.

I employ three UM alumni and am gearing up to bring my first theater MFA student to the prison as an apprentice. The work is exciting, rewarding and utterly exhausting. Outside of writing grants and monthly reports it's been hard to find time to do some writing of my own. I have a new play brewing in my head, *In Loving Memory*, and am in the process of writing a training manual, *Actors Working in a Correctional Setting*. But I am consumed with my work in prison at the moment.

I recently attended a conference for Arts in Corrections in San Jose, CA. It was sponsored by the William James Association and the California Lawyers for the Arts, and was attended by people from all over the country. We, as a country are in the liminal place of trying to dig ourselves out of the mass incarceration hole that we created in the 1990's. The arts are figuring prominently in the equation. Due to recent evidenced-based research, statistics show that the arts are critical in the reduction of recidivism and successful re-entry. The First Step Act has opened a door that has been shut for a very long time. As the program director of a heavily funded program, I accept the burden to get things right, to provide a high quality experience to those I serve. So, in that regard, I am trying to not beat myself up for not taking more time to write at the moment. In fact, I'm trying to remember that absorbing and listening to the world around me is where all of my plays come from in the first place. So... I really am writing right now... in my head, at least. I may be too busy for words right now, but it won't be long before I take pen to paper.

Ahhh life... it's no joke!

Leah Joki
MPN Western Slope Representative



Post Scripts



- On this **back page of MPN News**, we'll print any announcements you might like to share with our membership and the general public that highlight writers' news and associated events around Montana. Send us your information and we'll include it in the next MPN News issue to come out in May, 2019.
- If you want a **copy of MPN's Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws**, just send a note to: montanaplaywrights@gmail.com.
- **Share this newsletter** with your friends and anyone else who you think might be interested in our events or joining the Network. Go to our **website** to get more information:

www.MontanaPlaywrights.org.

Montana Playwrights Network Board of Directors

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Regional Representatives

Central District:

Jane Ogle

Northern Highlands:

Jay Pyette

Western Slope:

Leah Joki

Take advantage of this "Members Only" opportunity!

Open Call for the "Montana Voices" Publication Project

"Montana Voices" Competition Complete Guidelines

available on our website.

(Previously titled "Montana Monologues" & "Montana Tales")

www.MontanaPlaywrights.org

MPN Positions Open

MPN is in need of two

Regional Representatives from Eastern and Southern Montana. If you are interested in serving, or know someone who may be, please contact Pamela Mencher by phone at 406-235-0353, or email her at:

montanaplaywrights@gmail.com.