

Special Olympics at Acalanes

By Cathy Tyson



Springhill Elementary School had 32 athletes participate in the recent Bay Area Games.

Photos Cathy Tyson

Over 550 student athletes from around the Bay Area have been training for weeks to prepare for the third annual Bay Area Games held at Acalanes High School sponsored by Special Olympics Northern California. Setting the stage with music, dignitaries, passing of the flame of hope to light the cauldron, Acalanes cheerleaders, singing of the National Anthem, and more, Special Olympics Northern California CEO Rick Collett welcomed everyone saying, "Special Olympics changes lives, and

seeks to create a more fit and tolerant community." It takes more than a village to put on an event of this scale, a team effort with 150 Acalanes students and others serving as volunteers helped make it all possible. Many members of the Acalanes track team participated as volunteers, along with students who are involved in the Best Buddy program who meet with their buddy every Thursday at lunchtime.

"It's so much fun, we really learn a lot," said Hanna Roberts of her buddy Logan Casey. The event

kicked off with the first ever race that featured "Unified Partners" where students with and without disabilities come together as teammates – to promote living and playing inclusively.

Nearby Springhill Elementary had 32 athletes participating in the friendly track and field competition. Special Ed teacher Erin Caldwell said her students had six weeks of practice and competed in three events that included throwing, running and jumping to build confidence and self-esteem.



From left: Tess Olsson, Hanna Roberts, Logan Casey and Serena Candelori.

Town Hall Theatre's New Director and New Season

By Sophie Braccini



Town Hall Theatre's new artistic director, Joel Roster with Jenny Wehrmeister, THT's new director of education. Photo Sophie Braccini

Town Hall Theatre board president Betsy Streeter is very comfortable with Joel Roster's nomination as THT's new artistic director. Nine months ago, Derrick Silva was appointed to replace long-standing director Clive Worsley, but Streeter acknowledged that although Silva is a talented director and actor who brought many good things to the theater, the fit was not there.

"Joel comes from the ranks. We had offered him the job when Clive left, but he said he was not ready; we are very happy he accepted this time," she stated. "We are a real family."

To replace him as director of the popular education program the board chose Jenny Wehrmeister. "Jenny is a natural," said Streeter. "She is the most infectious person and can just light you up. She is also very organized and has been working for the program with Joel for some years." Roster and Wehrmeister got married at THT just a few months ago.

Roster exuded energy and passion as he described his first season as artistic director at THT, scheduled to open in September with the musical comedy "Company" that received 14

Tony Award nominations and six wins. Roster acknowledged that the return of musicals to the main stage was one of Silva's ideas. "It is more expensive to do musicals," he admitted. "The play rights are two to three times higher, and you need a music director and musicians. But people love musicals and the one we chose has been a trailblazer since it opened."

A self-proclaimed night owl, Roster loves to get up early to get a lot of things done; as a result the theater is his second home. Born to two actors, the young director remembers his first theatrical experience at age 4 when he saw his father in "Fiddler on the Roof." He acted throughout high school and started being paid for it before graduation. While taking classes at DVC he earned more roles and became a fulltime actor, and soon after, a director. He has worked at THT for 12 years.

Backed by an enthusiastic board, Roster is planning what he calls a ground-breaking season with four shows that include the musical as well as a Pulitzer Prize winner. "The shows are very different, they are all inspiring and are told a little bit differ-

ently than what people might be used to," commented Roster. The second show opens in December: "It's a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play."

"It is the sweetest interpretation of that story," said Roster, who saw the show at the Marin Theatre Company last year. "It is for the whole family and it is also a very good play." He added that the script does no harm to Frank Capra's beloved movie, but adds a level of nostalgia. The third show, "Angels in America," was awarded the 1993 Pulitzer Prize for drama.

"This is a big year for us at Town Hall," said Roster, "marking the 100th anniversary of the building and the 70th anniversary of theater being played here. I wanted a play that would mark this moment."

He first thought of "Our Town," but the timing wasn't right since it will be performed at the same time on the other side of the tunnel. "Angels" is not an easy play. It is an epic story about the United States in the early 1980s when the AIDS epidemic was killing hundreds of thousands of people and America began to embrace its gay population. "I talked with Clive (Worsley) about this play, and at first he thought that our audience was not ready for it," admitted Roster, "but then he thought about it and agreed with me."

The fourth show, "Moon Over Buffalo," is a light comedy by Ken Ludwig that has been very well received everywhere it has played and praised as wildly funny.

The last show of the 2013-14 season will be Bernard Shaw's "Candida," which will open at Town Hall Theatre May 24.

For more information, visit www.townhalltheatre.com.

History Comes to Life for Moraga Third Graders

By Sophie Braccini



Mary Ostrander, in her 100th year, talks to school children about life growing up on a dairy farm. Photo Sophie Braccini

When Mary Ostrander talks to third graders about life on a dairy farm at the beginning of the 20th century, she speaks from experience. The soon to be 100-year-old, who still drives her red car from Moraga Royale to the library where she volunteers with the Historical Society, loves telling incredulous youngsters of a time with no Internet, television or washing machines, when women daily cleaned the kerosene lamps that gave light at night and butter was made by hand.

"When I was a little girl, we milked our five cows, put the milk in a pail, then poured it in a separator," Ostrander told the children, "then my brother and I would collect the cream; my father would take it to the creamery where it would be churned into butter." Every morning, fresh milk from the Moraga Valley would be taken by carts to what is now Emeryville and shipped to San Francisco. She showed the children the big catalogues that people received in the mail where they could find everything from a woodstove to the metal irons that had to be warmed on the stove, to feed for animals.

Ostrander's talk was part of an historical field trip for Moraga elementary school children that took them from prehistoric times to when the railroad track ended in 1957. The presentation was divided into five sections: first, Kathy Zuber talked about prehistoric Moraga when mastodons, bigger than mammoths, roamed the hills. Later in the day, the children went to Bollinger Canyon and observed the geological strata that formed over millennium. Then Pam Williams discussed the Saklan Indian civilization and their way of life in the East Bay settlements, which were forever disturbed by the arrival of the Spaniards. She talked about the land grant in 1835 of 13,000 acres, roughly what is now Lamorinda and Canyon, given to Joaquin Moraga and his cousin Juan Bernal. The children

viewed from afar the original adobe home that Joaquin Moraga built for his family.

Susan Sperry continued the presentation, talking about how Moraga lost most of his money and land in a legal dispute between miners who didn't find gold, but instead came to squat the land. She also talked about the time Canyon had more registered voters than any other town in California because of the rowdy lumberjacks who cut all the redwoods to construct the beautiful San Francisco mansions. Then Sam Sperry told the children about how James Irvine converted most of the cattle ranches into pear and walnut orchards, and how the Sacramento Northern railroad that was in operation between 1913 and 1957 transported the pear crops and made Moraga the capital of Bartlett pears.

As part of their tour, the children also visited the Moraga Ranch, which used to be a settlement for the orchards' workers, and the Hacienda de las Flores built by Donald Rheem in the late '50s.

"It is a very well organized field trip," said Ann Ralph who teaches third grade at Donald Rheem Elementary School. "We count on the parents to drive the children around, and on the volunteers to tell all the stories. Over the years we've created a little packet that the children have to carry around and answer questions, adding accountability in a fun way." For Rheem School the field trip is the introduction of the social studies unit on local history.

"Before 1999 we used to go to classrooms to present the information to the kids," added Historical Society volunteer Elsie Mastick. "Our hope is that enough money will be raised to purchase and preserve the Moraga Adobe and that it will be the central point for the historical days, for children in Moraga, Orinda and Lafayette."

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