



BALL OF LIGHT... Andrew Webster, Head of School at Wardlaw, introduces Judi Barrett, author of "Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs," pictured reading to children at top left. Mr. Webster, who aided children with arts and crafts activities, top right, said books should be "balls of light" in people's hands, bottom left. Ms. Barrett's book will be turned into a movie in March 2009.

Forecast Calls for Cloudy With a Chance of Inspiration

By MICHAEL J. POLLACK
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

AREA - A few weekends ago, author Judi Barrett came to The Wardlaw-Hartridge School in Edison to entertain and enrich young minds - several from the Westfield/Scotch Plains area.

While she has written many books, including "Animals Should Definitely Not Wear Clothing," "Benjamin's 365 Birthdays" and "Pickles to Pittsburgh," Ms. Barrett is most renowned for her best-selling work "Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs."

Familiar with youthful audiences because of her career teaching art to children from kindergarten to third grade, she demonstrated her own young imaginative mind to the audience.

Ms. Barrett brought out dolls she made when she was 8. She also spoke of "Timothy Turtle," the first book she wrote and illustrated, even binding it with string. Through retelling tales of her youth, explaining the history of the works, showing the artifacts and reading to the youngsters, her efforts hoped to inspire the children, many sitting with family members in the auditorium.

In an event that was as much about the joy and liberation of literature as it was a celebration of craft - specifically, that of Ms. Barrett - Andrew Webster, Head of School at Wardlaw, conjured the famous expatriate poet Ezra Pound, who said, "properly, we should read for power. Man reading should be man intensely alive. The book should be a ball of light in one's hand."

Keeping with that conceit, he said that "ball of light" has the power to "shine and illuminate."

He said the goal of education was to make "meaning out of fact." Unfortunately, he said, while facts are important, education needs to "emphasize and celebrate the story," which has its basis in fun and imagination.

Holding a giant press sheet to the delight of the young readers, children excited at the use of color and texture to show the falling foods that rain down on the land of "Chewandswallow."

Describing the nature of that term, Ms. Barrett said she was "not a great eater" when she was younger, and her mother constantly tried certain methods to get her to eat, always imploring her to "chew and swallow" after every bite.

She said the ideas for her stories exist in her mind, but are the hardest part of creating a story. "Ideas are always up there. When I have ideas, I write them down on a piece of paper and save them. This book came about because I thought of the sentence 'One day, Henry walked outside his house and got hit in the head with a meatball.'"

While the creative process can be inventive, sometimes marketing a book can be a different type of adventure. Ms. Barrett said, detailing her frustration with how the publishing company balked at her original sequel title "Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs II."

Instead, the book became "Pickles to Pittsburgh." Looking back, Ms. Barrett said it was a "mistake" not to market it as a sequel. However, "sometimes you can't fight with the sales department," Ms. Barrett said, recalling that the department told her sequels in the literary world don't function like *Rocky* and *Rocky II*.

Last, Ms. Barrett previewed her newest book, "Never Take a Shark to the Dentist," by showing giant colored drawings on slides for the children, who giggled and grinned at the playful situations Ms. Barrett placed creatures in. As with "Cloudy," Ms. Barrett thought of an interesting line - "Never take a giraffe to the movies" - and the rest is history.

Following the completion of arts-and-crafts activities with the kids,

including the creation of their own literature, Mr. Webster's wife, Aurea Hernandez-Webster, told *The Westfield Leader* and *The Times* she was "very happy...to have exposure to people who are practicing artists and writers, and understanding where



ideas come from."

She said between the visual and literary examples shown by Ms. Barrett, the students "become cre-



IT WAS THE BEST OF TIMES... At the Arthur L. Johnson (ALJ) High School's "Broadway Night" sponsored by the ALJ Key Club in Clark, Ron Sharpe and wife Barbara Russell perform numbers from the soon-to-premiere musical, *A Tale of Two Cities*. The husband-and-wife producers of the musical donated their time and talents to the March 29 charity benefit for New Jersey's Children's Specialized Hospital.



By SUSAN MYRILL DOUGHERTY
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

AREA - Woodbridge residents Ron Sharpe and wife Barbara Russell know firsthand that the Mel Brooks version of *The Producers* isn't really the scenario to raise money for a Broadway production.

At one of their Investor's Nights, I got a chance to see the behind-the-scenes work it takes to try to raise \$11 million for *A Tale of Two Cities*, an original musical by Jill Santoriello.

The excitement is there: the music, live performers as well as the producers, who hope to share their vision. Mr. Sharpe says of their pairing up with the writer of the sensational musical, "A few years ago, we met Jill, a talented writer, heard the score and it was a no-brainer for us. We wanted to see this grow into a big, booming, spectacular show."

Being producers, "we can set our own schedule," said Mr. Sharpe of the duo. He and his wife, both former Broadway performers in *Les Misérables*, now give voice lessons in their Union County home.

"As producers, we do everything," he explained, "from getting the cast members and space together to pulling the creative team together."

"It takes great loyalty of family and friends," [to keep sticking with a long-term project] Mr. Sharpe shared. "Most people don't know it takes from seven to 10 years to put together a Broadway show from start to opening night."

That was news to me. Three years ago, I had heard some of the music of *A Tale of Two Cities* on their demo CD and was thrilled to hear the update on the project. Powerful voices, superb characterization and faithful representation of the Charles Dickens' work

practitioners."

When there exists a combination of texts and visual, she said, "there's an energy created. It's an important partnership in language development. It's a pairing that's underestimated."

Regina Bassoul-Restivo, Head of the Lower School at Wardlaw, told *The Leader* and *The Times* she saw the impact Ms. Barrett had when one girl said to her that she wanted to explore a career as a writer.

"To actually see the author of a children's book that they're familiar with makes it inspirational."

"That quality exists in this school," she added. "We truly - even though our curriculum is advanced - focus on edu-

cating the total child. All the students here have art. All the students have music...We feel that enriches their understanding of literature."

TAKE THE STAGE

Real-Life Local Producers Handle *A Tale of Two Cities*

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novel I had read three times in high school.

There they were that night, come to life, the characters I loved and loved to hate—from the knitting maven Madame DeFarge and the evil Marquis St. Evremonde to sweet Lucie Manette and the drunken Sydney Carton.

The Backer's Night I attended was in Morristown and a succession of others were held in NYC's Marriott Marquis. About 80 to 100 people filled the hotel space to hear a narrator give bits and snippets of the storyline, as the actors sang the songs or parts of them with superb piano accompaniment.

It was a magical night, one with promise, optimism and creative energy.

An average investor doesn't realize how profitable Broadway is with not only the show itself, but also the road companies that go out around the world as well as the spin off products. "A show like *Wicked* pulls in a million dollars a week with packed houses," Mr. Sharpe said.

The overview in the investor's packet bills the show as "a classical dramatic musical in the mold of *Phantom of the Opera*, *Cats* and *Les Misérables*."

Just what audiences are looking for right now, the show also boasts a "value-driven" theme that could play equally as well in New York, the United States and around the globe. I couldn't agree more.

I just wish I had an extra \$100,000 to invest in the show that is opening in Florida within the next few months and is slated to open on Broadway in September 2008.

If you have hit the lottery and want to back a gorgeous musical, check out the website of ataleoftwocities.com

Summit's Wong Chesk Builds A Mountain Of Memories at UCC

By MARYLOU MORANO
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

CRANFORD - Summit artist Carole Wong Chesk explores diverging premises in her exhibit, "Memories and Mountains: Works in Mixed Media and Clay," currently at Union County College's Tomasulo Gallery.

While the theme of mountains is common in works of art, the use of memory as a medium is quite novel.

To achieve this unique perspective, Ms. Chesk uses old letters and photos to recreate her younger self. In doing so, she honors not only her earlier years, but those people who were significant in her life.

A potter, sculptor and mixed-media artist, Ms. Chesk's exhibit consists of vessels and other sculpture in clays, hand-cast paper and silkscreen, among other media.

An artistic technique particularly evident in "Memories and Mountains" is the artist's use of found objects, fiber and paper, which she positions alongside the items of sentimental value.

One of the more typical pieces falling under the "memories" category of the exhibit is "Family," a mixed-media wall hanging measuring 18 by 24 inches.

This piece of art is created from an aged photo of a woman and three children dressed in traditional Asian garb. A frame chiefly composed of metal and wood surrounds the photo. Placed strategically at the top of the frame is a metal pyramid-shaped hat of the type traditionally worn by coolies.

The family's gaze is penetrating, and the people's eyes beg the viewer to ask them to tell their story. Staring back at the solemn group, one cannot help but wonder what family secrets they hold.

Ms. Chesk works in a studio -

complete with a 35-cubic foot gas kiln - in a carriage house behind her home. The kiln allows her to live her pottery with classical Chinese and Japanese glazes.

The pottery pieces that lend themselves to the "mountains" of the ex-



Chesk - "Family"

hibit. This particular theme was inspired by the artist's visits to the Metropolitan Museum of Art's exhibit, "Sacred Mountains in Chinese Art," and Tibet and Yellow Mountain in China.

The piece central to the exhibit is "Mountainscape," three sculptures created from white earthenware. "Mountainscape's" intricate construction leaves no doubt as to its prominence in the exhibit.

"Carole weaves her personal family history with eye-catching visuals and does it all with grace and a won-

derful command of her materials," said Valeri Larko, director of The Tomasulo Gallery.

We are drawn into her personal world, finding pleasure in the beauty of the work but also enjoying it on a deeper more spiritual level.

Ms. Chesk holds a Master of Fine Arts degree in Sculpture from Bard College, and a certificate in Art and Design from the Cooper Union. In addition, she has done graduate studies at Montclair State University, Kean University and the New York University Institute of Fine Arts.

She is currently an instructor of ceramics at the Visual Arts Center of New Jersey (VACNJ) in Summit and Montclair State University in Montclair.

Her work is part of the permanent collection of the Morris Museum in Morristown.

She is the recipient of numerous awards for art and teaching from the NJ State Council on the Arts and the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation.

"Memories and Mountains" will be on display at Tomasulo Gallery through tomorrow, April 20.

The gallery is located on the first floor of the MacKay Library on the UCC's Cranford Campus, located at 1033 Springfield Avenue.

For more information and for Tomasulo Gallery exhibit hours, call (908) 709-7155.

Quinn And Mills

To Visit UCC May 4

CRANFORD - On Friday, May 4, at noon, world-renowned artist Joanna Quinn and Les Mills of Beryl Productions International Ltd., will present an animated, multimedia Visiting Artist Lecture in the Roy Smith Theater at Union County College's Cranford Campus located at 1033 Springfield Avenue.

The lecture will focus on their career work as artists and designers, and will highlight their internationally recognized design and film animation. The event is free and open to the public.

The latest of Beryl's animated short film productions, *Dreams and Desires - Family Ties*, won many celebrated awards in 2006. It has been one of the select animation films to be on the short list for Oscar award recognition.

For more information, contact Professor Anthony Nicoli at (908) 497-4261.

WSO Friends Home Tour To Feature Farmhouse

WESTFIELD - One of the local homes selected by the Friends of Westfield Symphony Orchestra (WSO) for their 23rd Annual Tour of Notable Homes Saturday, May 5, is a distinguished rambling farmhouse, circa 1937, reminiscent of Colonial times.

Located in the Wychwood section of town, this residence has undergone major renovation and expansion, meticulously infusing modern conveniences while preserving the style and ambiance of the original farmhouse.

The small kitchen has been transformed into a gourmet masterpiece. New additions include a back porch, mudroom and powder room. The original den has become a spacious dining room with fireplace and bay window.

The heart of the home is a wonderful family room, featuring a large multimedia work of art from France, one example of the fine international art that the owners have collected during extensive world travel.

A sophisticated mix of new and antique furniture, including a "lion's head" settee and other fine antique family heirlooms, is also found throughout the home.

Sioban Davey, co-chair of the tour, which raises funds for the WSO, said, "The home is full of personal touches. The talents of the home owner who personally restored, reupholstered and in some cases, repurposed antique furniture acquired from her family are just phenomenal."

For the enjoyment of those who join the tour on May 5, a cellist will perform throughout the visit.

"The Westfield Symphony Orchestra could not exist without the funds raised from this annual tour as ticket sales cover less than one third of our costs," said David Wroe, music director of the WSO. "The symphony and the community, really, owe a huge debt to The Friends."

Tickets for the 2007 Tour of Notable Homes are \$25 (\$30 at the door)

Kean Univ. Hosts LOC's The Barber Of Seville

WESTFIELD - The Little Opera Company (LOC) of New Jersey, a division of the New Jersey Workshop for the Arts (NJWA), will present a fully staged production of Rossini's comic opera, *The Barber of Seville*, on Saturday, April 21, at 2 and 8 p.m., at the Wilkins Theatre at Kean University, located on 1000 Morris Avenue in Union.

Co-directed by Fausto and Valerie Pineda, the performances will be conducted by Maestro Michael Spassov and will include a professional cast of international opera singers.

Starring as Figaro is Argentinean baritone Gustavo Ahualli, who has performed with Teatro San Martin, and in the United States with Sarasota Opera, Opera Theater St. Louis and Palm Beach Opera.

Cuban-born tenor Luis Cabrera, who recently made his Lincoln Center debut, will perform as the Count. Mezzo soprano Perri Montane, from Georgia, sings the role of Rosina. Ms. Montane was district winner in the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, and has performed with the Lyric Opera of Chicago, Hudson Opera Theater and Opera Roanoke.

Jorge Ocasio, who has performed with Opera Eldorado, Connecticut Grand Opera and Opera de Puerto Rico, will perform the role of Dr.

Bartolo.

Bass Tom Avakian will perform the role of Basilio. He is a staff member at the NJWA, and was last heard with the LOC in its production of *La Bohème*.

Young Artist Tony Mowatt of Union will perform the role of Fiorello. Tony is a junior at Union High School, and recently performed the role of Masetto in *Don Giovanni* with the LOC.

The ensemble includes talented young people from throughout New Jersey who participate in the LOC Young Artist program. Students, ages 10 to 18, have studied for several months preparing to perform as the soldiers, narrators and townspeople in this production.

"We are very grateful to everyone at Kean University for helping us bring opera to Union County. The Wilkins Theatre is a great place for the community to attend great performances locally. We are proud to be included in their programming," said Ms. Pineda, executive director of The LOC.

Tickets for *The Barber of Seville* are \$35 for adults, \$30 for senior citizens and Kean alumni, faculty and staff, \$20 for students and \$15 for children. For tickets, call (908) 737-SHOW or log on to KEANSTAGE.com.

POPCORN™

Year of the Dog Will give you Paws



By MICHAEL S. GOLDBERGER
2 and 1/2 popcorns

One Popcorn, Poor • Two Popcorns, Fair • Three Popcorns, Good • Four Popcorns, Excellent

In *Year of the Dog*, Peggy (Molly Shannon) lives with her beagle, Pencil, in a nice enough but nondescript tract home. She drives to her perfunctory job in an equally blah econobox. Once there, she goes through the motions with diligent, albeit uninspired efficacy. So it was bound to happen...the awakening.

Let's face it. We weren't about to watch her sleepwalk through life for 98 minutes. Filmmakers know there's just no market for it. Even the uncomfortably polite, biweekly visits to her brother (Thomas McCarthy) and sister-in-law's (Laura Dern) house were punctuated with obligatory nothingness.

Nope, this is an epiphany just waiting to happen. It's odd, though. Whereas the poet confirms that most men lead lives of quiet desperation, they just won't stand for such behavior in their fiction. So too bad if it takes a personal tragedy to rock the boat and get Peggy's revelations in motion.

Which is exactly what happens to Molly Shannon's perfectly proper wallflower early one morning. Her

world is turned asunder. The fallout is not readily perceptible.

Rather, it builds. And therein lies the plot as writer-director Mike White's film details Peggy's metamorphosis from introvert to animal activist. While she certainly cared for our non-human brethren before, she now aligns her sights with purpose...possibly even a vengeance.

Of course there are stops along the way, both dettractive and helpful. In the former category there is the single guy next door, heretofore a veritable ghost. But Al, portrayed by the splendid John C. Reilly, is a hunter. He smells the vulnerability.

Indeed finding herself in that condition, no longer as anchored by the dotting of i's, the crossing of t's and playing mother/sycophant to her petulant little boss (Josh Pais), she accedes to a date. It is a night of red meat and tales of the kill. We wonder how this will react with Peggy's heretofore-unrevealed libido.

We're still not certain of that commodity's nature, or if it even exists, by the time she moves on and meets Newt, Al's direct antithesis. Nicely played by Peter Sarsgaard, the card-carrying gentle soul is an animal advocate and trainer. And he has a profound effect on our girl in search of something or other. For one, she changes her dietary regimen.

At her brother's just a short while afterwards, Peggy proclaims her veganism. She rattles off the facts, the statistics, and a little bit of the party line. Hmm. By now we kind of like her. Hence, we can't help but speculate with slight shudder what window to her psyche it opens when she says, "Vegan...it's kind of nice being defined by one word."

There's a story here alright. But as *Year of the Dog* unravels, it becomes increasingly apparent that this is more a psychological study.

Not to worry, Dr. Freud. Director White forges no new ground. However, steering thankfully clear of pop analysis, his deliberation pieces together some interesting thoughts on how someone in search of meaning and identity might make the leap to obsession.

In the manner of many a small foreign film, moral judgment is left to the viewer. Thus, while not entertaining in the mainstream sense of the term, *Year of the Dog* does manage to fetch our interest with its own cerebral pedigree.

Year of the Dog, rated PG-13, is a Paramount Vantage release directed by Mike White and stars Molly Shannon, John C. Reilly and Peter Sarsgaard. Running time: 98 minutes.