

Arts & Entertainment

Washington School Players Take Audience on Wild Ride with "Roadsters and Jokesters"

By CHRISTIE STORMS
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD — This time of year, many of us would love to get away from the winter doldrums and travel someplace warmer, but our schedules and budgets do not always allow such a reprieve. Fortunately, those attending the Washington School Players' 65th Annual Show needed only step into the Roosevelt School auditorium last weekend to virtually experience a fun cross-country trip during "Roadsters and Jokesters."

A hybrid of National Lampoon's popular "Vacation" movies, "Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory," and MTV's "Punk'd" reality TV series, the show focused on the Grisword family's quest to become Hollywood famous.

They piled into their classic green and wood-paneled "family

truckster" station wagon to search notable U.S. cities for clues to win a contest. The grand prize was to become reality TV stars.

The road to fame was, of course, paved with mishaps, mayhem and some fantastic song and dance numbers performed by the parents and staff of Washington School.

By the end of the first act, the audience learned the Griswords' every move was already being broadcast for a reality show produced by Nashton Butcher, unbeknownst to the family.

Eric Lipkind, who portrayed Butcher, also penned the script, right down to its Willy Wonka-style ending, where he donned a top hat and dismissed the Griswords for breach of contract with Wonka's familiar line, "Good day, sir!"

True to Wonka-fashion, he also had a change of heart and offered

the Griswords their own TV show after all.

At this pivotal moment, the absurd family's patriarch, Clark (Bill Fallon), realized Hollywood is not what it is cracked up to be. He had instead learned to treasure every moment of the zany vacation because it was time well spent with his wife Ellen (Roselle Schjong), son Rusty (Greg Simpson) and daughter Audrey (Jackie Samuels-Jaffee). The family decides to forgo Hollywood riches and continue to live in Westfield.

Highlights of the road trip include their stop in Texas, where five Washington School dads performed an engaging hip-hop dance routine to "Bye Bye Bye" with signature 'N Sync dance moves led by Phil Leary.

The Griswords also managed to add another crack to the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia, and even met up with the "Brady Bunch" kids, who performed the eternally peppy "Sunshine Day" in the Grand Canyon.

But the destination that garnered the biggest laughs from the audience was the stop in Florida to wrangle with extremely slow-moving senior citizens, portrayed by Giulietta Albano, Mike Constantinou and Susan and Tony Cook. This marked the Cooks' eighth and final year of dedication to the show.

Mr. Cook described their exit from the beloved productions as "very bittersweet."

Also noteworthy was the solo performance of "I Will Survive" by Patty Vera and an elaborate flash mob-style chorus number, "All Over the World," featuring costumes from lands near and far.

Mr. Lipkind told *The Westfield Leader* and *The Scotch Plains-*

Fanwood Times it was his first foray into script-writing as his only previous writing experience had been for his college newspaper years back.

"I'm really into music, so I did the soundtrack first and wrote around that," he said. "I think for the most part, people tend to remember the music more than the dialogue."

The idea to use the "Vacation" premise popped up during a conversation with his wife, Lani, who also portrayed Marcia Brady.

Mr. Lipkind said the writing came pretty quickly for him, but the challenge was editing it and making sure it incorporated all the Washington School Show staples in the time allotted.

One of those staples, a couples' dance number, changed things up with a square dance set in West Virginia. That is also the locale that characters informed the Griswords that toothpaste had been invented because "if it had been invented anywhere else, it'd be called 'teethpaste.'"



WESTFIELD "GURLS"...Men dressed as singer Katy Perry perform a "kickline" to her popular "California Gurls" hit during the Washington School Players' 65th annual show "Roadsters & Jokesters" held last weekend at Roosevelt School.

Another staple that always seems to be a big hit with audiences was the men's dance number done in drag. This year, they donned bright blue wigs and dressed up as Katy Perry to perform her hit "California Gurls."

When the Griswords finally made it to Hollywood, Washington School Principal, Andrew Perry, and his staff posed as wannabe "Survivor" contestants for the traditional teachers' number.

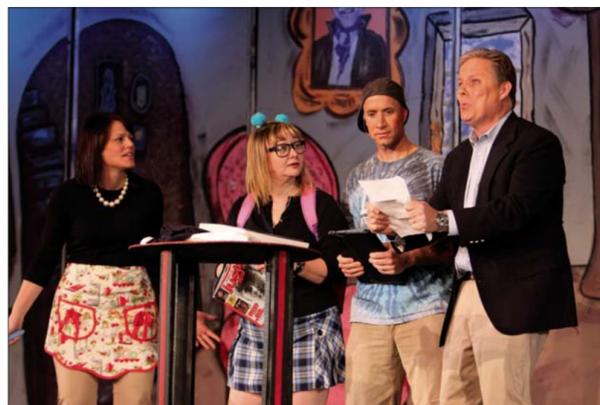
The scriptwriter also always manages to work in an annual "muck

and mire" joke, this year stated by Rusty when the Griswords were lost on the East Coast.

Mr. Lipkind said the highlight for him was seeing his thoughts and ideas that were once only in his mind "come to life on stage."

During intermission, musical director (and Westfield Board of Education member) Mitch Slater entertained the audience by belting out Bruce Springsteen music, accompanied by the show's eight-piece band. Mr. Slater no longer has chil-

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REALITY STARS...Clark Grisword, (portrayed by Bill Fallon), far right, announces to his family they have been selected to participate in a contest that can turn them into reality TV stars as part of Washington School Players' performance of "Roadsters and Jokesters." Parent actors, pictured left to right, are: Roselle Schjong, Jackie Samuels-Jaffee, Greg Simpson and Mr. Fallon.

Enjoy February Festivities at Trailside, Including Hocus Pocus, EcoArt and More

MOUNTAINSIDE — The Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders and the Department of Parks and Community Renewal are pleased to announce an exciting line-up of programs for families and adults at Trailside Nature and Science Center in Mountainside during the Presidents' Day Holiday weekend, from Friday, February 17, through Monday, February 20.

A special Monday magic matinee — "Hocus Pocus: It's Joe Fischer!" — on February 20 is recommended for children ages 4 and older.

Kicking off "February Festivities" on Friday, February 17, from 7-8 p.m. is "The Wit and Wisdom of Abraham Lincoln," a dramatization/lecture for adults, ages 18 and older. Christian Johnson, a dramatist with the American Theatre Organization, portrays President Lincoln and gives insight into his strength of character. This program is sponsored in part by the New Jersey Council for the Humanities and is free to attend. Donations are appreciated.

On Saturday, February 18, from 10 a.m. — noon, families with children ages 5 and older can use their creativity during Trailside's "EcoArt Extravaganza." Drop in anytime between 10 a.m. and noon to use your artistic abilities to make crafts from recycled objects. Participants will be amazed to see paperrolls become snakes, cereal boxes and magazine pictures become colorful bookmarks and egg cartons are transformed into beautiful flower arrangements. The fee for the EcoArt Extravaganza is \$5 per person for in-county residents and \$6 per person for out-of-county residents. Pre-registration is not required for this program.

Later on Saturday, February 18, join a Trailside staff member at 3 p.m. for Story Time and listen to entertaining stories of the season. Families should meet on the lower level of the Visitor Center by the bird viewing area. There is no fee for Story Time but donations are appreciated.

Also on Saturday, February 18, from 3:30-4:45 p.m., families can see how 100 percent real maple syrup is made from the sap of a sugar maple tree in "The Journey of Sap to Syrup." Find out what equipment is needed to collect sap and take part in a taste test to see if you can identify the real thing. This program will be repeated on Monday, February 20, from 10 — 11:15 a.m. The fee for this fun and educational program is \$5 per person for Union County

residents and \$6 per person for out-of-county residents. Pre-registration is required.

Another highlight of this weekend is the matinee, "Hocus Pocus: It's Joe Fischer!" on Monday, February 20, from 1:30 -2:15 p.m. This fast-paced show is a perfect blend of magic, audience participation, comedy and excitement. Joe Fischer, Magician Extraordinaire, puts on a show that is sure to astound, baffle and thrill the audience. He has a great rapport with children and his ability to engage audiences of all ages is "pure magic." This matinee is recommended for children ages 4 and up and the fee is \$4 per person. Tickets go on sale at 1 p.m. on Monday, February 20, at the Visitor Center Service Desk. Strollers are not permitted in the auditorium.

The February Festivities are designed to encourage families to enjoy the outdoors and gain a heightened awareness

of the natural world during the winter months. On Monday, February 20, from 3-4 p.m., families can join a Trailside guide for a walk outside in search of buck rubs, animal tracks and nibbled twigs during "Animal Clue Scavenger Hunt." We will look for signs that tell us that our animal neighbors are in the area. The Scavenger Hunt will conclude with hot chocolate and marshmallows around a campfire. The fee is \$5 per person for Union County residents and \$6 per person for out-of-county residents. Pre-registration is required.

For more information on these programs or any other upcoming events, call (908) 789-3670 or visit www.ucnj.org/trailside. Trailside Nature and Science Center is located at 452 New Providence Road in Mountainside and is a service of the Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders.

WCPs Announce Auditions for Don't Dress for Dinner

WESTFIELD - Westfield Community Players will hold auditions for Marc Camoletti's comedy *Don't Dress for Dinner* on Saturday, February 11, at 6 p.m., and Sunday, February 12, at 6 p.m. with callbacks on Tuesday, February 14, at 7:30 p.m. and Sunday, February 19, at 6 p.m. Auditions will be held at the theater located at 1000 North Ave., Westfield. The show runs May 5-19.

Character breakdown as follows: Bernard (age 27-35) Handsome businessman, flirtatious, playboy-British accent; Jacqueline (age 24-32) Bernard's wife. Lovely, assertive, romantic, British accent; Robert (age

27-35) Bernard's best friend and Jacqueline's lover. Handsome, reserved, British or may be American; Suzanne (age 21-25) Bernard's mistress. Fashion model with great body, chic, stylish French or British accent; Suzette (21-30) The cook. Friendly, working class, funny, great body, French accent; George (27-35) Suzette's husband. Big, huge, tall muscular, protective of Suzette with French accent.

Physical comedy is required by all roles. Scripts will be provided at auditions.

For more information, visit www.westfieldcommunityplayers.org.



MEMORIAL MUSIC...Kristen Schiavo of Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School and Anna Song of the Junior Musical Club play at the dedication of the Westfield Blue Star memorial marker, November 11, 2011.

WF Junior Musical Club to Hold Auditions February 5

WESTFIELD - The Junior Musical Club of Westfield, a club consisting of eighth grade and high school musicians, will hold the second audition of the academic year on Sunday, February 5, at 4 p.m.

The auditions will take place at the home of Alex Goldschmidt at 26 Hawthorne Drive in Westfield. Auditions are open to students currently in the eighth through twelfth grade who live in Westfield and the surrounding area.

The student must perform two pieces of contrasting style, and

memorization of some portion of a piece is encouraged. Also, the student must provide his or her own accompanist and music stand. If the student is unable to find an accompanist, he or she may contact Rebecca Dias, at home by calling (732) 396-4644, or on her cell at (732) 882-5681 or email Rbcca6@aol.com for a list of pianists.

To obtain an audition appointment, the student should contact Rebecca or Beverly Shea at (908) 654-1036, or email btspiano@gmail.com.

Stony Hill Players Present A Man For All Seasons

SUMMIT — The Stony Hill Players will present *A Man For All Seasons* on February 10, 11, 17 and 18, at 7:30 p.m. and February 12, and 19, at 3 p.m.

This historical drama by Robert Bolt tells of Sir Thomas More, a man of strong conscience and his dealings with Henry VIII, Cardinal Wolsey and Cromwell among others. The production will take place at the Oakes Center, 120 Morris Ave. Summit. Dennis Ryan directs.

For more information call (908) 665-1376.

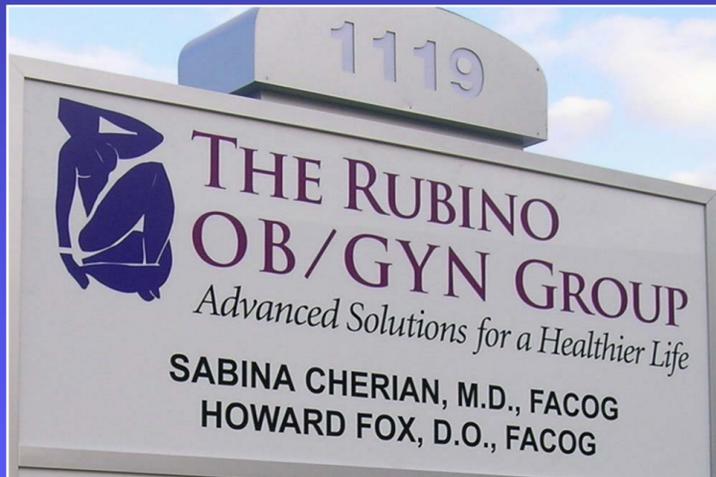
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