

The little theatre that could

By Jeanne Ferris

Just like the children's story about the little engine that could, with a positive attitude and a lot of hard work the North Coast Repertory Theatre could be called the little playhouse that could.

NCRT began from an all volunteer cast and crew to a nationally recognized theatre operating under an Actors' Equity contract, (a national union for professional theatre performers and technical support). Olive and Tom Blakistone were the founders with the dream of a creating a respected performing arts group and provided the initial funding for the space NCRT has occupied for 19 of the 28 years of performances in Solana Beach. With her Master's degree in speech and drama, Olive Blakistone served as artistic director for 15 years. Tom Blakistone served as business manager for 13 years. This is a cozy and intimate 194-seat playhouse (you can easily see the actor's eye color in the front row), which proudly presents award-winning seven "Mainstage"

productions annually. The revolving sets are cleverly crafted despite the limited stage space. "I love the social aspect of attending the theatre with good friends," said Jocelyn Seamans, an "opening night" ticket holder for five years. "I like knowing I am supporting something local."

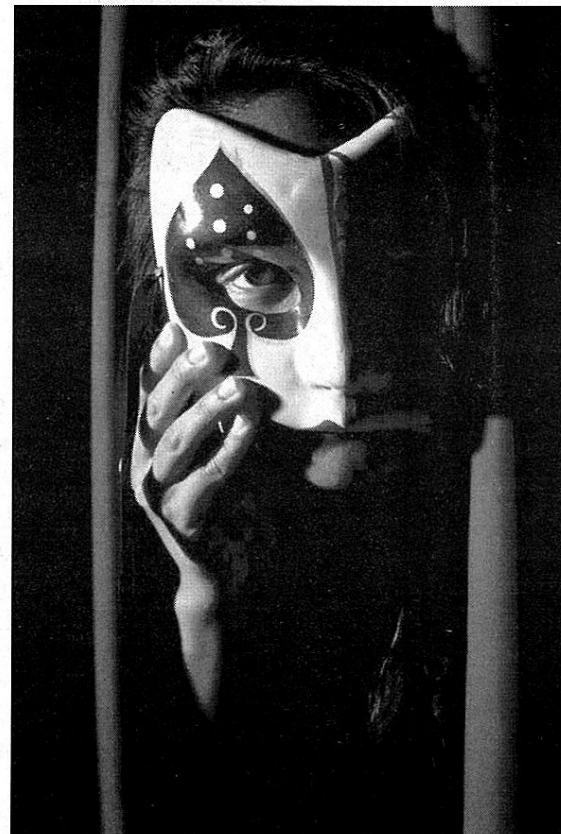
"For \$125, I get to see seven professional plays," said Lisa Casella, also a longtime opening night fan. "The challenge for me is to stay awake before the curtain rises."

This little playhouse has a big agenda for its theatre school. According to the NCRT website, the arts and education program which is offered to all children and teens comprise: in-school residency, workshops (before, during and after school), Drama In a Box, a unique improvisational workshop pulling random costumes and props from a trunk, Theatricum (hands on experience of a full production in American, Greek, and Shakespearean classics), and internships for high school and college students.

"Before I found NCRT, I was very shy, and had little self-

confidence," said Emily North, 13, a devoted student at the theatre school. "I can remember being shy beyond belief to audition for the first time. But by the time I had done my first show, "The Velveteen Rabbit," my confidence had improved dramatically. Since then, I have done four shows at the theatre. For me, the best part of theatre school would have to be the feeling of being part of something. Being part of a cast gives you this amazing feeling of belonging."

A little known fact regarding the arts and education program, Behind the Mask deserves a special mention for its altruistic intent because it is a partnership between The Theatre School at NCRT and New Alternatives, a provider of residential facilities for dependents of the Juvenile Court who have been removed from abusive or neglectful homes. Instructors provide weekly theatre classes in a safe and nurturing environment for children, 8-17 years of age. An intensive eight-week session allows the participants to express emotions positively and creatively. When coming from



trauma to drama, performing arts have always been a powerful modality used in counseling and therapy to help with the facilitation of emotional and mental balancing. Behind the Mask is in its sixth year and is funded by gifts from individuals, businesses and foundations. Interested donors should go to www.northcoastrep.org.

The volunteer outreach for the North Coast Repertory Theatre is extensive enough to require a coordinator and one of its volunteer resources is the National Charity League, 12 | October 2010

The North Coast Rep helps fund Behind the Mask, a provider of residential facilities for dependents of the Juvenile Court.

unteers as ushers, box office personnel, and concession attendants. With an annual budget exceeding \$1.5 million and a 10 person staff, volunteers are still an integral part of the success of the little playhouse that could.