

Put your spelling to the test with special Library bee



By Brock Weir

Spelling can be a serious business ? just ask Theatre Aurora and the Aurora Public Library.

But, if you think you've got what it takes to go the d-i-s-t-a-n-c-e, these groups invite you to step up and face off for a new spin on the traditional spelling be next Saturday, January 16.

?This is the fruit of a very successful larger partnership which has come to be known as the Aurora Cultural Roundtable,? says Cindy Shaver of the Aurora Public Library (APL). ?We have been fortunate enough to work with Theatre Aurora (TA) on a number of initiatives.?

For TA's Sergio Calderon, this is the perfect blend of literacy and theatrical fun and recently Mr. Calderon has come to see firsthand just how serious a business spelling bees can get. A long-time veteran of TA, Mr. Calderon sits in the directors' chair for this month's production of the musical The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee, which ostensibly focuses on a bunch of twelve year olds participating in a tumultuous spelling competition. But that is not the spin TA has put on the Tony award winning favourite.

?For me, it is all about what the story is and what is being told,? says Mr. Calderon. ?The title can be misleading that you're going to see a bunch of 12-year-olds do their spelling be but, for me, my approach is this is a memory play. These are adults who are remembering the spelling bee when they were twelve. When you're twelve and competing in something, it is always life and death! The amazing thing about it is the moments where each of them have their epiphany and their moment where they grow up and realise, ?Hey, it isn't all about this. There is so much more to life and this world I think I can enjoy, and I don't have to be so emotionally wrought about winning and losing this particular event in my life.?

Mr. Calderon started theatre around the same age as the characters in the play took on their do-or-die competition and within the theatre, even as a youngster, he says there is a sense of competitiveness but, in the end, it was more about the challenge than the competition.

?I have a fascination with Leaf,? says Mr. Calderon of a perennially popular participant in the on-stage bee. ?Every character we have been working on are all extraordinarily difficult and my challenge, coming from a performance background, is trying to get Leaf to be super simple yet insanely complex at the same time. I think that is where we get into this idea of caricature. I don't want him to just seem feeble and simple-minded. He is just simple in the way he lives life and his philosophy and that is walking the fine line where I don't want it to be about the joke or his silliness. I want him to be a complex character that lives simply.?

Participants looking to show off their spelling skills, or even those simply looking to cheer on the competitor of their choice, will be treated to a sampler of what TA's upcoming production has to offer, and there will, of course, be prizes to boot. In the end, both Ms. Shaver and Mr. Calderon agree this partnership is all about forging a connection, not just between their two organizations but the community with the community as a whole.

"I have crazy, romantic notions and, for me, it is about participation and being involved," says Mr. Calderon. "I think we have evolved into such a disconnected, isolated, socially-minded people that I feel participation is the only way we can get to the heart of what really matters, or connect to other people.

"This theatre season is all about creating connections."

The Spelling Bee gets underway at 2 p.m. TA's production of The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee opens at Theatre Aurora on January 21, running on select dates and times through January 30. For more information, visit www.theatreaurora.com.