

Valdez theater conference endures rumors, boycott

By MARK BAECHTEL
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According to Dawson Moore, coordinator for the Last Frontier Theatre Conference in Valdez, preparations for the event -- one of the cultural highlights of summer in Alaska for the last many years -- won't be affected by recent vandalism that caused extensive damage at Prince William Sound Community College, where the conference is headquartered. While Moore said some estimates of the damage run as high as \$100,000, none of the conference files or facilities were targeted.

But while preparations have been moving forward for the June 18 to 25 event -- which has operated under a cloud since the resignation in November of college president Jo Ann C. "Jodi" McDowell, the conference's founder and the engine that drove it to national prominence -- progress has not been without major hitches. This includes a boycott by some of the luminaries who've brought attention to the conference in the past, including Edward Albee, who will be making good on his stated intention to stay away now that McDowell will no longer be part of the picture, and frequent attenders such as John Guare, Romulus Linney and Patricia Neal. Absent also will be Michael Warren Powell, who had been mentioned until recently as one of the headliners still expected to be in attendance but who has had to bow out due to ill health.

Moore said he was on track to pull in the lion's share of approximately \$300,000 that constitutes the conference's operating budget, "give or take \$10,000 or so." Moore said most of the "significant" funders from past years had lined up to offer their former levels of financial support, with Exxon's Sea River Shipping Co. being the lone exception. When we spoke, Moore was still waiting to hear from a couple of grant-making organizations, including the Rasmuson Foundation, but was confident that things were going to come through. His optimism may have been given a boost by the fact that local support for the conference has firmed up since University of Alaska president Mark Hamilton met with Valdez city leaders to quell ongoing rumors that the university wanted to uproot the event to bring it to Anchorage.

"They've really pulled around and gotten behind us," Moore said. "Once they talked with Mark Hamilton, they were persuaded."

Moore stressed also that the Play Lab, the conference's centerpiece, was looking good, with the schedule having been revamped to focus more on participants' writing than on providing -- in



Violinist Audrey Solomon, left, cellist Lars Hoefs and pianist Rose Huei-Ju Chen, students at the University of Southern California, placed second in the Music Teachers National Association's competition April 2 in Seattle. They performed as the Blue Rose Trio. (Photo by Anchorage Daily News)



Moore ()

Moore's words -- "an education in the history of American theater."

Alaskan shares prize in music competition

Alaskans were among the honorees at the Music Teachers National Association's competition April 2 in Seattle: The Blue Rose Trio, which represented the Southwest Division and took second place with a performance of music by Anton Arensky and Paul Schoenfield, featured Anchorage-raised Audrey Solomon as its violinist and Lars Hoefs -- who has performed with Solomon in Alaska performances -- as its cellist. The pair, along with pianist Rose Huei-Ju Chen, are students of the University of Southern California.

The conference features several competitions that spotlight some of the best young musicians in the country. After picking up the trio's award, Solomon told the Daily News that she and Hoefs expect to make a summer trip to Alaska to present classes and performances. Chen said her schedule wouldn't allow her to make the trip, but the other two were hopeful that Olga Bell would be able to rejoin them. Bell, also from Anchorage, is studying on the East Coast. She has previously performed with Solomon and Hoefs as the Ionis Trio.

Park Service names resident artists

Two painters and a quilter will be heading to Denali National Park for artist residencies this summer, according to the Park Service. The artists, selected by a panel of three Alaska artists and three Park Service staff members, are Linda Beach of Chugiak, Rod Weagant of Haines and Kevin Munte of Erlanger, Ky.

This is the fourth year for the park's artist residency program, which puts three artists in the shadow of Mount McKinley for up to 10 days from June to September. The artists stay in the historic East Fork cabin at Mile 43 on the park road and are expected to prepare a program for visitors and donate a piece of their art to the park.

According to the Park Service's announcement, Beach is a quilter "who draws inspiration for her fabric works of art from her love of nature and the Alaska landscape. She will sketch and photograph ideas for quilts during her residency, which she will use to create a full-size drawing.

By utilizing a variety of fabrics from different eras and many sources, she hopes to create a work that will inspire others to explore the park or remind them of a moment they cherish from their own visit. Her quilts are in numerous private and public collections across the country and have been the recipients of several awards."

Weagant is a plein-air painter and teacher who has spent the past 25 years pulling the landscapes of the Yukon, Alaska and the western Lower 48 into his work. According to his plan, Weagant will do a series of small paintings while he is in the park and will produce larger works when he returns to his home studio.

Munte, an assistant professor of painting at Northern Kentucky University, is a landscape painter who specializes in large-scale studies of the West. Like Weagant, he will be committing a series of smaller studies to canvas, concentrating on McKinley, after which he will return to the studio to execute several large studio oils.

Alaska artists who have received Denali residencies in previous years include Rachelle Dowdy, David Moffett, John and Jona Van Zyle, Rebecca Voris and Kesler Woodward, as well as Outsiders Diane Bywater from Wisconsin and Patricia Savage from North Carolina.

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