

Islanders involved in making arts at Courthouse Center

By Dylan Paschke

Two Jamestowners are headlining the newest play at the Courthouse Center for the Arts in West Kingston. Lisa and Caellum Kerr and the rest of the company are in rehearsals for "A Christmas Story," which, like the film of the same name, is based on the book by Jean Shepherd.

The center offers theatre, art, music, film, education and a new café in their most ambitious season so far with the musical "Cabaret" and an upcoming Artcraft show in December.

Center Stage Productions, the theatre entity at the Courthouse Center, is in the middle of a successful run of the musical, "Cabaret," which is set in 1930's Berlin at the beginning of Nazism. The play, directed by Russell Maitland, emphasizes the dance numbers and incorporates the ensemble as much as possible. "Cabaret" runs through Nov. 23.



Jimmy Grauk and islander Iris Bohensky look over the week's schedule at the Courthouse Center for the Arts.

Photo by Dylan Paschke

According to Marketing Director Iris Bohensky, Center Stage Productions started this past March, when Russell Maitland was brought in as executive di-

rector. Next year will be the first full season. The professional theatre, which has a normal seating capacity of 108, has a busy season planned including, "Junie B. Jones and a Little Monkey Business," "The Graduate," and two Rhode Island premieres, "Dirty Rotten Scoundrels" and "Violet."

A Jamestown resident, Bohensky started working for the Courthouse Center while finishing her degree in Business Management at the University of Rhode Island. She is now the marketing director and helps in almost every aspect of the center. Bohensky "likes the interaction with the people here," and says the center offers "a great environment."

Bohensky also works as stage manager for some of the theatrical productions. When asked what her favorite show has been, she says "Cabaret." "It's so very good."

Education has always been a large part of what the Courthouse Center does. There are tap and

jazz dance classes available, as well as two sessions of a theatrical summer camp scheduled in July for middle and high school students. They are also planning on expanding the Children's Education Program by developing a Shakespeare Company for Kids, and a Youth Playwright Workshop in which high school students will work with professionals on all the aspects of producing a short play.

Jocelyn Donaghue, another Jamestown native, is the director of visual arts at the center and oversees the 18th Annual Artcraft Show. This year's show features work by artists from Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Connecticut and New York. The show runs Friday, Dec. 5, from noon to 7 p.m., and on Saturday, Dec. 6, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. One of the highlights this year will be a book signing of "Oliver's Surprise: A Boy, a Schooner and the Great Hurricane of 1938," by Jamestown author, Carol Newman Cronin.

The Courthouse Center for the Arts is also dedicated to the preservation of the old Washington County Courthouse, which they purchased in 1989 for \$1 and the promise to create an art center in the historic building.

The building is constantly undergoing changes and has just opened the new Artisans Café.

In addition to Bindi desserts and gelato, the café features art and music by Rhode Island artists. The Artisans Cafe will be open Monday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Despite the changes, the old courthouse retains much of its original grandeur and character. "There is still a holding cell downstairs," claims Donaghue with a smile. Donaghue joined the art center in December 1999 just after the company moved into the courthouse from the smaller building next door.

The center also shows encore presentations from the Rhode Island International Film Festival.

It employs professionals, but also uses volunteers to help with their many programs. They especially look for people to help with set construction, costumes and volunteer ushers during the performances.

Center Stage Productions will hold auditions for "Dirty Rotten Scoundrels" and "Violet" on Dec. 17 and 18, from 7 to 10 p.m.

The Courthouse Center for the Arts is located at 3481 Kingstown Rd. in West Kingston. For more information on current or upcoming events, visit the Web site at www.courthousearts.org, or call 782-1018.



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