

Willow Glen Children's Theatre

Parents' Meeting – November 23, 2013

Minutes

Attendees: Patricia Bilello, Denise Gagner, Rebekah Blechman, Michelle Unger, Kim Ingram, Irene Martinez, Belinda Solovei, Tristan Rodriguez, Korrine Adams, Heather Simonovich, Iraj Zarrinnaal, Laura Zarrinnaal, Torie O'Reilly, Lori Cutright, Diana Pohle, Linda Bojorquez, Hans Cardenas, Julia Van Roo, Bernadette Rodriguez, Sandy Shapiro, Neil Shapiro, Gavin Coffing

Meeting objective

The primary purpose of this parents' meeting is for the WGCT staff to communicate to this session's parents what to expect for the final weekend of this session, given changes to performance dates and times, costume requirements, and so on. Additional agenda items were added by the Friends of the Willow Glen Children's Theatre ("Friends"): election of new board members and announcement of an upcoming fundraiser.

Review of what is happening with this session of the WGCT

Gavin began by updating us on the status of this session of the WGCT. He stated that there have been budget problems which have been worked out moving forward, but there will be no play this session. He then explained why. He began (for the benefit of new parents to the program) by explaining his method of writing and scheduling rehearsals. Gavin told us that, once the budget problems got worked out, we just ran out of time this session to do the play. Gavin feels very strongly that it is not safe to do a play in a short period of time, and that the decision not to do the play was his alone. If you are disappointed, he urged you to talk to him. He wants to make very clear, however, that this decision was NOT about "we can't do this session the way we've always done it, so we're not doing it at all." Gavin thinks too much of the WGCT program for that to happen. He did tell us that we will have a performance of sorts, to be held during the regular session on Saturday, December 7 from 10-12. The play will be called "Quit For Now" (based on Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part 2*). It will consist of the part of the play that Gavin has completed, plus some additional scenes. Diana took this opportunity to let parents know that there will be a cast party, which we hope will be on December 7 at 1:00 pm at Rosie's Pizza (**Secretary note:** the time and date for the cast party has been **confirmed**). Cast party flyers will be distributed via e-mail and will also be available on the WGCT website (www.wgct.org)

Gavin opened it up for questions at this point, and there were several, mostly dealing with how we will move forward for future sessions. Torie addressed the budget situation at the Willow Glen Community Center, and that of the WGCT. She stated that there will be plenty of money for the spring session due to cost savings from this session. Torie

and Lori will be meeting with Amy to go over the hours that the WGCT staff can have for the spring session. Torie told us that communication between the Center staff and the WGCT staff has greatly improved, and reiterated what Gavin had said, that this situation will not happen again. This improved communication will also include regular meetings between Torie and Lori and Friends, although the first such meeting will not happen until January. Diana requested that the first meeting happen sooner than that; a January meeting will be too late to address issues with the upcoming session, for which registration begins on December 7, 2013. Torie then told us that the spring session will be longer, although, later in the meeting, when we were given the starting and ending dates (February 22 to the weekend of April 25), it was clear that this is not the case. She told us that, following recent discussions with Diana, the overhead for the WGCT for the fiscal year 2013-14 will only be 12% rather than 35%; the 35% will not kick in until 2014-15. Torie and Lori then told us that the cost of the spring session will be raised to \$238, a 53% increase over the current cost of \$156 (**Secretary note:** In an e-mail several days later, Lori clarified that the cost is \$230 for San Jose residents and \$238 for non-residents). This prompted several more questions from parents; Torie understood the level of frustration among the parents present and urged them to contact their San Jose City Council representatives with their concerns, including such a steep price increase, and financial statements for the WGCT over the last three years, statements which are full of misinformation and accounting errors which the staff of the Community Center are either unable or unwilling to explain.

Friends of the WGCT business

We had a couple of items of business concerning Friends. First, we wanted to propose Hans Cardenas as the new co-chair of Friends, replacing Traci Truttman, who we want to thank for all her work with Friends. Hans was voted in unanimously! Next, we proposed Bernadette Rodriguez as an at-large Friends Board member. This also passed unanimously. Congratulations to Hans and Bernadette! Finally, Julia told us that the term "co-chairs" is not used in California. She proposed that we change these positions to "President" and "Vice-President". This motion also passed unanimously. The by-laws of Friends will be updated.

Friends fundraiser tonight

Diana told us that tonight the Comedy Sportz performance at 7:15 will be a fundraiser for Friends. For everyone who buys tickets for this show and presents a flyer, \$3.00 will be donated to Friends. We hope we will have a great turnout!

Post-meeting discussions

The parents' meeting ended at approximately 11:00 am. However, several discussions continued on, and we felt it important to let you, the parents, know about them. Torie and Lori shared their feelings with Diana that the role of Friends is not to have input on the WGCT budget and financials; Friends is merely a fundraising arm of the WGCT. In response to this, Neil will distribute copies of the Friends by-laws once the changes detailed above are made. Diana pointed out that the sharing of WGCT financial

information started before Diana took on the role of Friends co-chair and was continued by Torie, Lori, and Mary O'Meara at the meeting between Center staff and Friends that occurred back in March, 2013. At that time, incomplete and inaccurate numbers were shared with Friends as justification for the pressures and changes to the WGCT program at the beginning of 2013. Diana advised Torie and Lori that Friends does not want to be as engaged in the administrative elements of the program, but that the consistently inaccurate calculations have raised the level of concern of all involved that the restrictions and price increases that the WGCT keeps facing may only be perceived as necessary because of the serious accounting errors and inconsistencies. Friends would like assurance that the Center staff has an accurate financial picture before serious changes to the WGCT are instituted. Friends and the broader parent community do not have this confidence today. Torie suggested that it might be possible for Diana or another Friends representative to meet with one of the city's financial analysts to understand the situation more fully. Diana indicated that this would be of great interest.

Another discussion after the parents' meeting concerned the fact that Friends has been disappointed with the unwillingness of the Center staff to collaborate on how to approach the Friends scholarship program. Although there seems to be a disconnect between Friends' objectives for collaboration and the Center's disinterest in engaging in dialogue on this topic, there was agreement that the city website and potentially other city communications can include a note about reaching out to Friends for financial assistance through the Friends e-mail: friends@wgct.org

Diana stated again a point she had made during the parents' meeting: there is a need for a meeting between Center staff and Friends before January, so that issues may be addressed before registration for the next WGCT session begins. Lori indicated that this is not possible due to furlough days. Lori stated that the WGCT is taking too many resources and too much time as it is. Friends continues to be concerned about this lack of urgency.

Finally, Lori and Torie proposed that the WGCT may be best suited to being a not-for-profit program and rent space from the Center rather than continuing as a city program. There was acknowledgement that this was previously discussed at a meeting between Center staff and Friends in early November. Diana told Torie and Lori that additional discussions with Gavin and Friends would need to occur before they could determine the feasibility of this option. Lori and Torie advised that they only book the Center three months in advance and could not guarantee the multi-purpose room would be available on Saturday mornings if we were to pursue this option. However, they would give the WGCT 50% off the not-for-profit rate for the first operating year.

Respectfully submitted,

Neil Shapiro

Friends of the WGCT Secretary

