

"Art is the only way
to run away without
leaving home."
—Twyla Tharp

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Annual Membership Meeting is Friday, April 9, 2010

The Eastern, Central and Western Regions will be connected by telephonic hookup for the Meeting in order that members in all regions may be able to hear statements of candidates running for election to Council.

The statements will begin at 2:30 p.m. (Eastern Time), 1:30 p.m. (Central Time) and 11:30 a.m. (Western Time)

The meeting in the **EASTERN REGION** will convene at 2 p.m. in the Council Room on the 14th Floor of the Equity Building, 165 West 46th Street, New York, NY

The agenda will also include the following:

- **Special Order of Business** to solicit suggestions for the following agreements:
Musical Stock/Unit Attraction (MSUA), which expires October 31, 2010
Council of Stock Theatres (COST), which expires December 26, 2010
- Membership Discussion Period in accordance with the By-Laws

A Sign Interpreter will be present on request. Equity's TDD telephone number—Telecommunications Device for the Deaf—is (212) 302-4306.

The meeting in the **CENTRAL REGION** will convene at 1 p.m. in the Member Center, Room 1522, at 125 Clark, Chicago, IL

The agenda will also include the following:

- Report of the Central Regional Vice President
- Report of the Central Regional Director
- **Special Order of Business** to solicit suggestions for the following agreements:
Musical Stock/Unit Attraction (MSUA), which expires October 31, 2010
Council of Stock Theatres (COST), which expires December 26, 2010
- Membership Discussion Period in accordance with the By-Laws.

The meeting in the **WESTERN REGION** will convene at 11 a.m. in The Bellamy Room on the Fifth Floor of the Equity Building, 6755 Hollywood Blvd., Hollywood, CA

The agenda will also include the following:

- **Special Order of Business** to solicit suggestions for the following agreements:
Musical Stock/Unit Attraction (MSUA), which expires October 31, 2010
Council of Stock Theatres (COST), which expires December 26, 2010
- Membership Discussion Period in accordance with the By-Laws

Equal Employment Summit Convenes in Chicago; All Regions Participate

Sunday, January 17, 2010, quietly marked an astounding milestone for Actors' Equity Association. The suggestion by some that the issues that surround the Equal Employment Opportunities Committees (EEO) are not important to Actors' Equity Association was laid to rest.

The EEO Committee Chairs from all three regions (Christine Toy Johnson, Julia Breanetta Simpson, Cheryl Lynn Bruce, E. Faye Butler and Barbara Roberts) and all EEO staff members, traveled to the Chicago office for the first National EEO Summit, overseen by Central Region Business Representative Luther Goins, National EEO Coordinator. The Summit was conceived to give a national perspective to the issues that face the Union.

The agenda included open, honest, and frank discussions about the many concerns that follow Members of Color (which



Attending the EEO Summit are: (front row, l to r) Business Rep Michael Van Duzer, Eastern EEO Co-Chairs Julia Breanetta Simpson and Christine Toy Johnson, Central Regional Director Kathryn V. Lamkey, Central EEO Chair E. Faye Butler; (back, l to r) Business Rep Pearl Brady, Western EEO Chair Barbara Roberts, Central EEO Chair Cheryl Lynn Bruce, National EEO Coordinator Luther Goins.

include African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, Asian-Americans, Native Americans), women, seniors, and performers with disabilities.

EEO: One Voice, a new brand agreed upon at the Summit, quickly and easily states the mission of Equity's

EEO Committees and the ongoing work that needs to be done. Being unified nationally can only give Equity a stronger and more powerful presence in the performing arts industry and will allow for more meaningful change when it comes to diversity.

Equity, U/RTA Reach Three-Year Agreement Increases Achieved Despite Dire Financial Outlook

Equity and the University/Resident Theatre Association (U/RTA) have achieved a three-year agreement following negotiations in New York on January 11 and 12, 2010.

Senior Business Representative and Equity's Chief Negotiator Christine Provost reported to the Council:

"At the current time, universities are experiencing incredible financial difficulties. State cuts in appropriations to higher education thus far over 2008-2010 have run as high as 18% in states wherein U/RTA theatres reside (of the eight U/RTA members, seven are state institutions). The universities described their

economic environments to be somewhere between 'hostile and terminal,' with job eliminations, pay cuts, mandated furloughs, and building shutdowns. The feeling among some was that the very existence of their programs was threatened."

Nevertheless, despite a

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Your Income Tax Prepare to Prove It

**By Sandra Karas
Volunteer Income Tax
Assistance Program**

Q: What is a five-letter word that means "examination?"

A: Audit !!

As I mentioned in last month's article, we are looking into the increased numbers of audits of our members' personal income tax returns and especially focusing on the association between "by mail" correspondence exams and the repeated rejection of the ordinary and necessary expenses related to performing artists.

Earlier believed to relate to

the geographic area in which the exam was conducted, we now know that virtually all audits conducted by mail, and not in person, result in problems for those in our industry and others.

The Internal Revenue Service has reorganized the procedures in an effort to reduce or eliminate the time and staff attention to local, "in person" audits, creating a system of mail-in responses by taxpayers to IRS requests for substantiation. The letter arrives in your mailbox, indicating that your return has been selected for examination and requiring documentation as proof for specific items on the return. The substantiation requires the photocopying of myriad receipts, bank and credit card statements, contracts, itineraries and the explanations as to travel and per diem arrangements.

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Members Urged to Continue Pressing for Health Care Reform

**By Rachel Laforest
Public Policy Director**

As we rounded out the month of February, Congress' discussion and activity regarding national health care reform had receded into the background of the public arena. Even the formidable labor forces had retreated on the health care front, with most of their work tied up in back room meetings with members of Congress to push them not to abandon the budget reconciliation process or some of the deals worked out in December. This looks to be a clear sign that national priorities have shifted and health reform is in trouble unless the American public con-

tinues to make itself heard.

Replacing health care on the public stage has been a battle over the method for reducing unemployment and creating jobs. Unfortunately the same partisan politics that established the roadblock to health care reform is tak-

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STAGE MANAGER SURVEY

Dear Editor:

The results of the 2009 Stage Management Occupational Trends Survey are now available at <http://smsurvey.info>.

The 2009 survey had 525 participants, including 318 Equity stage managers. The survey included questions about calling techniques and show management, which were further analyzed by union affiliation, age, experience, training and gender. For instance, the older the stage manager, the more likely that she/he creates a back-up copy of the calling script (51.9% of 61-70 year olds, but only 25.8% of 26-30 year olds).

If you have questions for the 2011 survey or would like more information, please contact david-mcgraw@uiowa.edu.

David McGraw

REMEMBERING CARLETON DAVIS

Dear Fellow AEA Members:

How many times in your career can you remember that you turned down an offer to do a job and the producer said, "No. I am not going to take *no* for an answer. I will call you back in three days?" How likely is that to happen? If you say

Letters to The Editor

Letters received from paid up members on subjects of concern to Equity members will be considered and published as soon as possible. The Editor reserves the right to limit letters to 150 words and to select one or two representative letters when many similar letters are received. Letters must be signed, but names will be withheld on request for those letters which may affect members' employment. Signatures will not be withheld on letters antagonistic or accusatory, either implied or expressed, against other members. Opinions expressed in Letters to the Editor are not necessarily those of Actors' Equity Association.

"No," they hang up and call the next person on the list, right? Carleton Davis called me to do a summer job on the famous New England circuit on the Eastern Seaboard. I was really new to New York, and admittedly didn't know the ropes. I was employed at another theatre at the time. I had never given notice on a contract and, quite frankly, didn't know how to do so. Carleton called again, and once again I said, "I am employed at the time, and I feel I must stay where I am." He called a third time and insisted, saying, "I want you to really think about this. This is June. I am offering you workweeks through mid-September. Your loyalty is admirable, but if that theatre needed to release you for any reason, they would not think twice." That suddenly made sense to me and I went to the producer where I was working and gave notice. When the news was out that I was leaving, fellow cast members asked what it was that I was leaving to do. I said, "*Camelot* for Carleton Davis on the New England seaboard." Immediately a fellow cast member said, "Oh my God. Jeanne Lehman is Guinevere in the production. *You are going to love her.*" So, AEA Councillor Jeanne Lehman and I met in *Camelot*, thanks to Carleton, and married soon after. February 2010 we will happily celebrate our 30th wedding anniversary. I tried foolishly to turn this job down, and had I done so, and had Carleton accepted my decision, I would have missed the love of my life. Carleton always took delight in saying that he brought Jeanne and me together, and he *did*.

I am certain we are not the only ones that met on Carleton's circuit and I am sure there are other couples with similar adventures, not to mention the lifelong friendships

that came out of his tours. Carleton Davis provided more work for more actors than any other producer/packager I know. He loved his work and having been a successful actor and brilliant singer, he loved actors. He had such integrity with every show he put together. He and partner, Dick Natkowski, lived across the street from us for many years, at 71st and Broadway, and were far more than just colleagues; we were dear, dear friends. Jeanne and I reflected on the fact that Carleton provided 11 tours for us over the years. That circuit was probably one of the most sought after summer jobs to be had because of the locations involved. Who would not want to spend two weeks in beautiful Ogunquit, Maine, at one of America's foremost and famous summer theatres?

Jeanne and I could write a book of funny stories involving Carleton Davis. I know we are joined by many, many actors in saying that Carleton is missed greatly. He and Dick were already missed, having retired to live among the flamingos and dolphins in Florida a few years ago. I called Carleton once at Thanksgiving and he said he and Dick were stuffing a flamingo for Thanksgiving. Of course. Always laughing, always dry, always loving. Carleton is missed by everyone.

Larry French,
New York

REMEMBERING ALAINA

Dear Editor:

When I arrived in New York in 1973 to take my bite of the Big Apple, four exceptional women nurtured me: Charlotte Crossley, Shezwae Powell, Ursuline Kairson and Alaina Reed. On Thursday, December 17, 2009, Alaina completed her journey on the Earth Plane, and went to receive her crown

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Council Acts on Central Membership Meeting Resolution Concerning Rulebooks

Concerned with the length of time it has taken to publish the Production and LORT Contract Rulebooks, the following resolution was passed unanimously by members present at the Central Region Membership Meeting of January 11, 2010. As required by procedures, Council's response is published below.

"Those in attendance strongly express the frustration of the membership with the extended delay in the signing and publication of the finalized Rulebooks for Production and LORT. Having completed negotiations and ratified the Production Agreement by September 2008 and the LORT Agreement by May 2009 a sufficient amount of time would seem to have elapsed to make the finalization of the Rulebooks a reality. The continued absence of a signed agreement and a published Rulebook is causing confusion for both the membership and the theatres. The body asks that the necessary action be taken to have the staff and committees prioritize the completion of these Rulebooks immediately."

In response, Council, at its meeting of February 16, 2010 discussed the matter and:

RESOLVED, unanimously by recorded vote, "to instruct the staff and committees to prioritize immediately the completion and publication of Production Contract and LORT Rulebooks. Further, to ameliorate such delays in future and to improve communication with the membership, Council requests that the President's Planning Committee discuss, and report back to Council in a timely manner, measures including, but not limited to, the following suggestions to facilitate closure of the post-negotiation process and to expedite the completion and publication of such Rulebooks:

Monthly post-negotiation reports to Council within three months following ratification, as ordered by the Chair, or sooner.

Generic negotiating timeline

and monthly reports in Equity News and website,

On-demand printing of Rulebooks."

Voting in favor: Mr. Aldrich, Mr. Ames, Ms. Arnett, Mr. Bogardus, Mr. Brogger, Mr. Cahn, Ms. Cameron, Mr. Carfrae, Ms. Daly, Mr. Dotson, Mr. Dunn, Mr. Ewen, Ms. Fallon, Mr. Hirsch, Ms. Horne, Ms. Ivey, Mr. Jerome, Ms. Johnson, Ms. Johnston, Ms. Jordan Mr. Jue, Ms. Karas, Mr. Kennedy, Mr. Kmiec', Mr. Knapp, Mr. Kramer, Mr. McDermott, Mr. Mooney, Ms. Moreland, Mr. Moye, Mr. North, Ms. Rice, Ms. Roberts, Mr. Rogers, Ms. Ross, Mr. Ruskin, Mr. Schmidtke, Ms. Slusser, Ms. Smith, Ms. Snodgrass, Ms. Toth-Grant, Ms. Tross, Mr. Watanabe, Mr. Willet, Mr. Zaloom.

Voting opposed: None.

Abstaining: None.

AEA Launches National Area Liaison Hotline System

Call 877-AEA-1913

Equity has established a new National toll-free hotline system for members who live in Area Liaison and office cities. The new number is 877-AEA-1913 (honoring the year of Equity's founding). Each Area Liaison city has its own extension, where members can access news and information in their region.

(1) Dial 877-AEA-1913

(2) Dial your city extension:

811 Atlanta
812 Austin/San Antonio
813 Boston
814 Buffalo/Rochester
815 Chicago
816 Cincinnati/Louisville
817 Cleveland
818 Dallas/Fort Worth
819 Denver
820 Detroit
821 Florida – Central
822 Florida – South
823 Houston
824 Kansas City
825 Las Vegas
826 Los Angeles
827 Milwaukee/Madison
828 Minneapolis/St Paul
829 Nashville
830 New Orleans
831 New York
832 Philadelphia
833 Phoenix/Tucson
834 Pittsburgh
835 San Diego
836 San Francisco
837 Seattle
838 St. Louis
839 Washington DC/Baltimore



ACTORS'
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EQUITYNEWS

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Centennial Plans Moving Ahead

Plans for Equity's Centennial celebration in 2012-2013 are moving ahead in an orderly fashion with the recent approval of a 100th Anniversary logo and outreach to theatre notables to serve on a leadership Committee of 100. Recent additions to the list include Billy Crystal, Chita Rivera, Liza Minnelli, Whoopi Goldberg, Betty Buckley and

James Naughton. EventQuest, Equity's Centennial consultant, is translating the new logo into a style sheet which can be used in a variety of media placements that should enable us to brand the Centennial celebration with a high national profile.

In the meantime, EventQuest and the Centennial Committee are engaged in

detailed examinations of the key elements of the proposed celebration to fix costs and identify possible sponsors. Plans still call for a celebration in which Equity members and theatre audiences across the country can participate, and which will enhance public knowledge and respect for the Union and craft of professional theatre.

Health Care Reform

Continued from page 1

ing its toll on any possibility of quick passage of a jobs bill as well—all while unemployment and the cost of health care continue to rise. In December, the House passed a \$154 billion jobs bill, including an extension of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) unemployment provisions. The Senate passed a \$15 billion jobs bill in the last days of February; however, it seems likely the road to agreement between the two houses and the passage of a final bill will be a long one. Jobless benefits began running out as of Sunday, with increasing numbers of Americans in danger of losing their coverage if the impasse is prolonged. As many as one million people could lose their unemployment benefits if the matter is not resolved this month.

Congress Caught in Partisan Gridlock

Congress appears to be crippled in its ability to resolve differences – both ideologically and practically- and move *anything* forward. Decisions regarding the most vital aspects of American life are completely tied up in whether they will make or break political careers in the 2010 elections. While this is not new, it is taking place at a time when Americans need their leaders to be as focused and cooperative as

possible.

The top five health care insurers reported historic profits of \$12.2 billion for 2009, a 56% increase from 2008. Anthem Blue Cross in California has proposed to raise premiums for California customers in individual plans by as much as 39%. Health Secretary Kathleen Sebelius demanded they provide information about their plans and received a report which showed other insurers also were seeking “extreme premium increases.” All the while, more and more Americans are being dropped from their insurance providers, are barred from coverage due to preexisting conditions, forced into bankruptcy because of out-of-control health costs and nearly 45,000 Americans die each year because they lack adequate health care.

Most Congressional conversations about how to address this crisis have been reduced to a debate over what mechanism to use to move forward. House leaders (previously unwavering in their demand for a public option) are now saying they will back off an explicit public option in the interest of passing *something*. Many officials express “exhaustion with the process” and are willing to pass the Senate bill as is and address the ills of the bill at later dates. But no one can be more exhausted than the American public, which has watched and waited, educated

itself, been vocal on its demands and will have to continue to do more.

Realistic Expectations

There’s no way to predict what the outcome of the health care reform process will be. If no reform is passed, the very sick will continue to be dropped from their health plans, millions will remain uninsured or underinsured and the rest of us will watch our premiums skyrocket. If the path of reform continues on its current trajectory there could also be some harsh realities:

* Equity members and all Americans could see an individual mandate to purchase insurance without any sturdy mechanism to ensure its affordability or the quality of coverage.

* Multi-employer plans such as ours may have to grapple with a tax leveraged on the health plans we provide resulting in a watering-down of the coverage or a reduction in the number of members covered.

* In the absence of any public Option, the Senate bills’ “open market” state-by-state approach could mean that insurers would be able to sell their plans across state lines, putting consumer protections in jeopardy. Insurers could gravitate to states with the most lax regulations and coverage requirements, craft insurance policies there and sell them to people across the country.

While there are several

Senators (18 at press time) circulating a letter urging Senate Leader Harry Reid, (D-NV) to pass the public Option via the budget reconciliation process, a letter already had been signed by 119 House members. The most effective way to move this initiative forward and keep the best pieces of the bill alive is for elected officials to hear from their constituents. The successes in this process have consistently come out of the public speaking loud and clear about their priorities.

Moving Forward

The bright side of this is that the fear of failure on the national level has once again spurred people across the country into action. The California State Senate passed their Single Payer bill SB810 in January and although it is not expected to be signed by the Governor, it has provided a platform for educating the public about the benefits and need for universal health coverage. There are dozens of single payer organizations and initiatives throughout the country that are growing in numbers and strength and are pushing people to get comfortable with articulating their needs to their elected representatives.

Equity will be participating in the nationwide Single Payer Conference in March sponsored by the Labor Campaign for Single Payer and the National Labor College in Washington DC. While

there is not always agreement on how to get there we will continue to work toward the realization of a single payer system in the United States. *Equity encourages all members to express their ideas and opinions on these issues and to engage in regular dialogue with their elected officials.*

At press time the public option letter signatories were:

Senators: Michael Bennet (CO), Barbara Boxer (CA), Sherrod Brown (OH), Roland Burris (IL), Dianne Feinstein (CA), Al Franken (MN), Kirsten Gillibrand (NY), John Kerry (MA), Frank Lautenberg (NJ), Patrick Leahy (VT), Jeff Merkley (OR), Barbara Mikulski (MD), Jack Reed (RI), Bernie Sanders (VT), Charles Schumer (NY), Jeanne Shaheen (NH), Tom Udall (NM) and Sheldon Whitehouse (RI).

We encourage members to call these Senators and thank them for their due diligence. We will provide a list of those Senators who did not sign on as well as the House members who have and have not at www.actorsequity.org. Please visit the Equity website for talking points on the issues and to get your voice heard.

For more information please visit:

www.actorsequity.org
<http://singlepayeraction.org/resources.html>
www.politico.com
www.commonwealthfund.org
www.segalco.com

Council Approves Changes to Members’ Project Code

The Members’ Project Code (MPC) has recently been revised and includes a number of important changes. Created in 1987 by and for Equity members, the Code is administered by the Area Liaisons in 24 cities nationwide and is designed to permit members in those communities to showcase their talents.

How does it work?

The MPC is intended to allow members to generate future work for themselves without having a producer. It can only be used by individual members and, unlike the Showcase Code in New York or the 99-Seat Plan in Los Angeles, it is *not* available for theatres, individual producers or producing organizations to use. It permits up to 20 performances in a consecutive five week period.

Among the revisions are:

- Internet is now considered a publicity tool but this doesn’t include any “captured” material.
- The budget for the MPC is now increased by \$500 to \$4,500.
- The revised MPC is now extended through December 31, 2012.
- The Code requires rather than suggests a house board,

a cast list or a program and encourages all three and adds that an acknowledgement that the production is operating under the Members’ Project Code must be included in publicity.

- New wording permits the MPC to be used in San Francisco if it can be determined what is an appropriate Liaison Committee since it is no longer an Office City. The MPC can be used in the Orlando area.

- Language clearly establishes that the MPC is not available in New York City, Chicago or Los Angeles.

- It is required that a copy of the MPC be given to all participants.

“Austin/San Antonio uses the MPC with great success,” says Bill McMillin, Liaison Chair. “Most, if not all of our MPC productions have sold out and offered future employment to our members. The MPC creates opportunities not otherwise available in our community and allows actors to stretch their creative talents.” Babs George, who acted as Treasurer in an Austin MPC production of *The Cherry Orchard*, adds: “Our production gave us a deeper understanding of Chekhov. It

increased our ability to reach a diverse audience with classic texts and resulted in industry recognition for future employment and projects.”

Philadelphia Liaison Chair Tom Helmer explained: “The MPC has been around for over 20 years allowing fellow AEA members to work together on material, either established or new, that excites their artistic desires to tell good stories. It’s a great way for our members to stretch their artistic muscles when they’re not working under an Equity contract.”

Tom Moriarty, who served for five years as Kansas City Liaison Chair and recently relocated to Seattle, helped to organize a “showcase” for the past six summers using the MPC to present an evening of six short plays. “The format had been so successful in Kansas City” Moriarty says, “that most performances sold out S.R.O. More importantly, this use of the MPC has directly created concrete work opportunities for our members locally, which encouraged a number of Equity Membership Candidates to join the Association as full Equity members.”

The Members’ Project Code, used for productions that are member-produced, is a viable way for members to showcase their talents. For more information, contact your Area Liaison.

2010 Annual Election Calendar

Friday, April 9, 2010	Annual National Membership Meeting (All regions via teleconference) Candidate Speeches
Monday, April 12, 2010	Distribution of ballots (from balloting company)
Friday, May 21, 2010	Deadline for receipt of ballots
Saturday, May 22, 2010	Tabulation Day

EquityUK Councillor Visits AEA Council Meeting

Peter Kosta, a 30 year member of EquityUK and a member of its Council since 1976, observed the Equity Council meeting on February 16, 2010. Mr. Kosta, who has appeared extensively on the West End in plays ranging from *The Mousetrap* to *Godspell*, for which he also served as the

Equity Deputy, serves on numerous committees for his union. Acting Executive Director Carol Waaser and Third Vice President Ira Mont extended a cordial welcome. “It was a pleasure to have one of our British counterparts visit us and observe the workings of a sister performer union,” said Mr. Mont.



EquityUK’s Peter Kosta is flanked by Ira Mont and Carol Waaser.

Your Income Tax

Continued from page 1

This obviously comes at a great cost and hardship to the examined taxpayer and obviously decreases the efforts associated with a face-to-face exam in the taxpayer's home city.

Had the process resulted in fair and accurate assessments of our members' returns, I would not devote time to this matter. A pattern has emerged, however, to reveal a systematic rejection of most, if not all, of the professional expenses reported following the "completion" of these correspondence exams. This requires the taxpayer to file an appeal of the initial determination and, essentially, begin the process anew, often with a tax attorney or other professional representative, and with no guarantee of a favorable outcome. Many of our members, too discouraged and lacking sufficient funds to file an appeal, simply acquiesce to the liability and pay the additional tax due.

Last fall, I initiated a relationship with the IRS's Taxpayer Advocate's office in Washington, DC to enlist much-needed assistance in reviewing these case patterns and the correspondence audits that seemed to engender them. In addition to the possibility of change of venue requests, I have asked for the Advocate's review and monitoring of a few cases. While the VITA volunteers

cannot represent taxpayers, we do provide letters that outline our ordinary and necessary business expenses as well as the reporting requirements for reimbursements in our contracts. Where the member's records were well organized, the appeals were generally favorable and our supporting letter was deemed helpful. The best preparation for these cases is to have fully documented records and receipts for all expense deductions as well as calendar entries and other contemporaneous records for job seeking, mileage, transportation to auditions, business entertainment and other expenses that require careful diary records.

We have learned some valuable information from these hit and miss cases: (1) It is more important than ever to be able to prove and explain every expense deduction. Gone are the days when you could sit down with an examiner in New York, Chicago or Los Angeles who is familiar with the entertainment industry. Your return is more likely to be reviewed by someone in Bensalem, PA or Ogden, UT who won't be able to see you, speak with you or afford you the opportunity to describe and explain your situation and work history. (2) The examination is likely to be handled by correspondence and, in spite of the records you provide, your

deductions will probably be rejected as unnecessary or, on the examiner's speculation, already reimbursed by your employer. Either way, you will likely be forced to the appeals level where, without proper representation, you will face a similar response. (3) Those on tour will have more difficulty establishing their tax homes, especially if they sublet their apartments while on the road.

We have had a few successes of late and the Taxpayer Advocate's office was of enormous help in arriving at a favorable determination. We hope that we can continue to rely on this assistance, but we also need to hear from members who have been or are being examined or audited. Whether you represent yourself or have retained a professional to represent you, we need to know what has happened and/or be able to assist you before you begin the process.

If you have been examined or audited in the recent past or have received a notice that your return has been selected for examination, please contact the VITA office in New York by calling (212) 921-2548 or by stopping in the VITA office on the 14th floor of the Equity building.

Sandra Karas is Secretary-Treasurer of Equity, Site Coordinator of the AEA, SAG & AFTRA VITA Program and an attorney in private practice.

A Remembrance of Conard Fowkes, or How I Survived Two Simultaneous IRS Audits

By Francis Jue

I first went to VITA (the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program) at Equity in 1985 because a fellow cast member from the Off-Broadway revival of *Pacific Overtures* happened to be one of the volunteers. I remember meeting Conard Fowkes then, exclaiming when he found out that I had taken time off from Yale to do the show, "Go back to school! Get your degree! At least they taught you enough to come here to get your taxes done!"

I had no idea then what kind of legacy Conard was creating at Equity. But I have since learned from personal experience how his advocacy has benefited professional actors and stage managers.

I did go back to school, graduating from Yale, which I later learned was also one of Conard's alma maters. A few years later, when I returned to New York to pursue an acting career, VITA became an annual pilgrimage.

I was first elected to Equity Council in 2003. I greatly admired Conard's stewardship as Equity's financial officer, and loved his editorial comments when I sat beside him in the back of the Council Room. We traded war stories about our times at Yale and in the biz.

Last year, I received two separate IRS notifications within weeks of each other, letting me know that they were auditing my 2006 and 2007 federal returns. They sent identical forms, challenging all my itemized business deductions.

Naturally, I freaked out! I immediately contacted Conard at the VITA Office, and he calmly advised me on how to respond, what information I needed to provide, how to justify categories of business expenses related to show business. After all, he was instrumental in formulating with the IRS the Performing Artist designation, along with expenses deemed customary and necessary to the profession.

With Conard's help, I sent in my responses to each audit, including itineraries, lists of employers, copies of receipts, bank statements, credit card statements, even my VITA worksheets. Within a few weeks, my 2006 audit results came back from the IRS office in Huntsville, NY, saying they were going to make *no* adjustments to my 2006 return. Success!

I was not so lucky when it came to my 2007 return. This auditor hailed from an office in Ogden, UT, and they responded to my documents by denying all my business expenses, assessing me over \$1,100. Why would the exact same kind of paperwork clear me one year and not the next? I panicked, and asked Conard if I should just pay it to get the IRS off my back.

He responded with a stern, "No!" and proceeded to assist me with my next response. By this time, Conard was very ill, and yet he insisted on personally going over my audit. He asked Sandra Karas, Equity's new Secretary/Treasurer, to assist me as well, and she gladly took up my case, personally contacting the Taxpayer Advocate's Office in Washington, DC.

Conard signed a letter, fashioned by Sandra, outlining all the business expenses that the IRS has customarily acknowledged as ordinary and necessary for actors and stage managers. He helped me edit my cover letter and additional supporting documents in response to the 2007 assessment. And Sandra persuaded the DC Taxpayer Advocate to monitor my audit, perhaps to use my case to educate the IRS on Performing Artists and their returns.

Over the next few months, I had more anxiety attacks, even cutting back on my holiday spending, just in case I had to make a big payout to the IRS. But Conard and Sandra remained stalwart through it all. Conard passed before my final results, but his final e-mail to me was full of optimism and characteristic camaraderie.

Over six months after the initiation of my 2007 audit, the IRS cleared me, making *no* adjustments to my 2007 return. The auditor even told Sandra over the phone, "If everyone kept records like Mr. Jue, we'd be out of work!"

I learned how to keep tax records from Conard Fowkes and the other amazing Equity volunteers at VITA. Without Conard and Sandra's help, I might have folded out of frustration, and been thwarted from claiming legitimate business expenses on future returns. *If you are being audited, I enthusiastically urge you to contact Sandra and the great folks at VITA.*

God bless you, Conard, for being such a Bulldog.

Meet AEA's National IT Department

Equity's National IT Department keeps things running smoothly and efficiently behind the scenes. Pictured here at their annual meeting in Equity's New York office are: (l to r) Joe Voves (LA Administrator), Kurt Lambertz (Programmer), Michael Caldwell (Chicago Administrator), Doug



Beebe (NY – National Director), Systems Analyst) and Jerry Huff (NY Administrator).
Karen Nothmann (NY Business

U/RTA Agreement

Continued from page 1

freeze in the first year of the contract, Equity achieved a 3% increase in salaries in the second year and a 2% increase in the third year, plus, there was an 11% increase in per diem and a \$25 increase in transportation reimbursement. Costume rental rates, which had not seen movement for some time, were increased to the current LORT rates, which for some items is a 100% or more increase.

In addition to financial gains Equity was able to improve the quality of life for Actors by achieving access to a 401(k) when the university payroll system permits, high speed

internet access, a television in Actor housing, direct deposit accessibility, issuance of new skin parts (including tights, hose, dance briefs, dance belts, dance bras, stockings), and a reduction in teaching hours. The Equity bio and logo will also be included in programs.

The Equity negotiating team included: Jeanne Lehman, Chair; Judy Rice, 1st Vice Chair; Tom Joyce, 2nd Vice Chair; Allyson Tucker, Brenda Thomas, David Sitler, Mark-David Kaplan, Bill McMillin; and staff along with Ms. Provost, Brad Bartolo, Pearl Brady, Timothy Smith and Jessica Mitolo.

This contract is used by eight members of U/RTA plus approximately 20 independent theatres and accounted for

2,522 workweeks and \$1,992,924 in earnings in 2008-2009.

Rulebook Available

The 2008-2011 Production Contract Rulebook is available in the Document Library on the Equity website: www.actorsequity.org. It is labeled "Language not Finalized." At press time, the Media rule was not included, as that language was still being worked on. Other language has been agreed upon, with the exception of one or two places where language may still be slightly revised.



POSTCARDS from the Regions

Chicago

“Jersey Boys” Help Chicago



Since opening on October 5, 2007 at the Bank of America Theatre, the Chicago company of *Jersey Boys* has been stalwart fundraisers for Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS and many local Chicago organizations. By the show's

final performance on January 10, 2010, the company had raised over \$1,150,000 for BC/EFA over 951 performances, including \$190,000 raised in the six weeks prior to the recent *Gypsy of the Year Competition*. This in turn allowed BC/EFA to

award over \$500,000 in grants to AIDS and family service organizations in Chicago over the same period of time, in addition to funding social services and emergency financial assistance offered to local entertainment industry professionals by the Chicago office of The Actors Fund. “We owe our success to the incredibly generous Chicago audiences and the support of our producers. But it was truly the Frankie Valli and Bob Gaudio autographed memorabilia that really excited everyone,” said Production Stage Manager Larry Baker. “None of this, however, would have been possible without the extraordinary efforts of the entire company—cast, crew and staff. We felt very fortunate to have been a part of this wonderful production and this was a simple way for us all to share some of our good fortune.”

Berkeley, CA

“Fat Pig” Donates Fat Check to BC/EFA



(L to r) Liliane Klein, Jud Williford, Alexandra Creighton, Peter Ruocco.

In November, 2009, Liliane Klein found herself elected to conduct the curtain speech at the Aurora Theatre after the company of Neil LaBute's *Fat Pig* threw itself into fundraising for Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS Week. “We figured I was the only character the audience didn't want to kill,” she recalls with a laugh. But, in truth, the audiences could not have been more appreciative of the effort. “I couldn't get over how

supportive the theatre community of Berkeley/San Francisco was,” says the Great Neck, NY native. “They were so grateful for the performance and so supportive.” Liliane and her castmates alternated collections: girls' night featured Liliane and costar Alexandra Creighton, while boys' night brought out the buckets with Peter Ruocco and Jud Williford. Over the course of only one week, the cast of four raised \$3,889.

New York

The Show (and Snow) Go On

Braving blizzard conditions, the Peterborough Players held their 2010 EPAs at Equity's Audition Center on February 9 and 10. Artistic Director Gus Kaikkonen made the journey all the way from New Hampshire to hold auditions for his upcoming summer season, which includes



(L to r) AEA Monitor Thia Stephan, Actors Mark Chapman and Julia Cook, Peterborough Players Artistic Director Gus Kaikkonen, Audition staff Keith Howard and Angel Wuellner.

The Blonde, The Brunette and the Vengeful Redhead; The Foreigner; Tartuffe; and The Torch-Bearers.

Actors Mark Campbell and Julia Cook, who toured together in *Mamma Mia!*, were among the 100+ actors who auditioned. “Every job I've gotten has been through an EPA,” said Mark. Julia joined AEA as an Equity Membership Candidate (EMC) and got the tour through an EPA.

The Audition Department's Keith Howard, Angel Wuellner, and volunteer monitor Thia Stephan, made sure that things went smoothly throughout the entire wintry day.

St. Louis

“Unbeatable” Company Helps Holiday's Needy



The cast, crew and production team of *Unbeatable: The Musical* at The Playhouse at West Port Plaza in St. Louis

raised \$175.00 for the United Way's 100 Neediest Cases during the holidays. “This amount isn't the thousands that other

companies raised but we were a small group who tried to make someone's holiday a little brighter,” said Equity member Michele Burdette Elmore. The company includes: Charity Dawson, Elise LeBarge, Emily Clinger*, Henry Palkes, John Flack*, Josh Limpert, Kevin Neyer, Kristy Cates*, Landon Shaw*, Mark Kelley, Michele Burdette Elmore*, Pamela Reckamp*, Paul J. Emery III, Rissa Crozier, Sue Silverstein (Emery Entertainment). (* AEA members) Not pictured: Paul J. Emery III, Doug J. Hagglund, (Emery Entertainment).

Philadelphia

New Fringe Code Approved

By Tom Helmer
Chair, Philadelphia Area
Liaison Committee

At its meeting on January 12, 2010, the Eastern Regional Board approved the use of a newly crafted Philly Fringe Code for the Philadelphia Live Arts Festival and Philly Fringe.

For many years, AEA members in Philadelphia have used the AEA Members Project Code in the Philly Fringe portion of the annual Festival. The new Philly Fringe Code was crafted by using many of the recently adopted changes to the AEA Members Project Code that Council approved in December 2009 (see story page 3). This new Code also takes into account some of the required elements of participation in the Fringe, including liability insurance and participation fees.

How does it work?

The use of the Members

Project Code at the Philly Fringe is being replaced by the newly approved Philly Fringe Code. This Code is created solely for its use by AEA members in the Philly Fringe portion of the Philadelphia Live Arts Festival.

Established in 2003 for the Live Arts portion of the Festival but never used, the old Live Arts Code has expired and will not be renewed.

Producers wanting to cast AEA members for productions in either the Live Arts or Philly Fringe portions of the Festival must use an appropriate AEA contract.

If you are considering participating in the Philly Fringe and want to find out more about the Philly Fringe Code, you may contact the Liaison Committee at phlliaisoncommittee@yahoo.com or call the AEA toll free hotline: 877-232-1913 ext 832 for additional contact information.

Dallas/Fort Worth**Discussion of Umbrella Theatres
Tops Annual Meeting Agenda**

Dallas members (l to r) Kevin Keating (back), Connie Coit, Ada Lynn, Pam Dougherty and Elly Lindsay.

**By Dennis Yslas and
Pam Dougherty**

About 30 members from the Dallas/Fort Worth area joined Western Regional Director Mary Lou Westerfield and Business Rep Timothy Smith at our annual meeting on February 1, 2010 at the KD Studio theatre space of Uptown Players. We opened with a brief moment to honor the memory of several beloved theatre community members lost in 2009. Then Area Liaison Pam Dougherty announced the agenda and Ms. Westerfield shared news from across the country. She updated the group

on LORT negotiations, talked about how the economy has affected theatres, and related specific examples (e.g., Las Vegas' *Phantom*, LORT wage freeze) of how Equity has worked with struggling producers to help them continue to hire AEA members.

When the floor opened up for discussion, a lively debate centered on the issue of our Umbrella theatres, the length of time they've used the agreement, and whether or not it's time for some of them to "grow up" to regular Small Professional Theatre (SPT)

contracts with AEA. Many in the group concurred that some sort of "clock" needs to be inserted into the agreement in order to make sure our members share in the benefits when a theatre grows. Some members expressed the belief that some of our older and more established Umbrella theatres could in fact support a regular, albeit small, SPT agreement. Timothy Smith explained some of the problems the theatres face as they expand—learning to budget wisely, managing uneven income from year to year, moving from unpaid to paid staff. He also explained how staff has to negotiate the unique needs of individual theatres, while keeping the playing field level with other area producers.

By group acclamation, two committee members whose terms were expiring (Deborah Brown and Dennis Yslas), and two new members (Sharon Garrison and Chamblee Ferguson) were selected to three-year terms on the North Texas Area Liaison Committee.

The meeting closed after a short discussion about pre-casting and members' concerns that some area theatres have held open auditions when roles have actually been pre-cast. The membership was encouraged to make specific reports when and/or if this happens in the future.

The Miracle at Ivoryton**By Joan Valentina**

*In October of this year I had the great pleasure of doing a production of *The Miracle Worker* at Ivoryton Playhouse in Connecticut. What made the production special is that the actress playing Helen Keller was deaf. The following are comments from our director Jacqueline Hubbard, other cast members, and my own thoughts about the production and the rehearsal process.*

Jacqui Hubbard:

For most small professional theatres outside of major cities, this tough economic climate has made producing a well-rounded season a challenge. Comedies and musicals are in; dramas are usually waiting in the wings. I knew that choosing a drama was a risk, but *The Miracle Worker* had the appeal of being a story

(ASL) alphabet, volunteered for a day at a school event for deaf children, and had many conversations with my neighbor Mary Lee who had taught sign language. Mary Lee's best tips were never to hold your hands too high when signing, and use your whole body—especially facial expressions—to convey your thoughts.

Day 5: We are almost halfway through the two-week rehearsal period. The process has been slower because everything has to be signed, but spirits are high. I have not yet had a conversation with Jenilee. This day she has a very large bag of gummy worms (one of my favorite candies) and I watch as she consumes massive amounts. All I can think is—she has removed her braces to play Helen and oh, the cavities. She must have caught me staring because she

crosses the room and offers to share. I sign thank you. We continue to eat candy on the break, and at the end of the night we hug. Just like that, the ice is broken.

Day 7: Our director tells us we are not accepting the challenge of entering



Joan Valentina (l) with Jenilee Simons Marques in *The Miracle Worker*.

that everyone knew. I knew that local schools included it in their curricula. Also, I felt strongly that the play should be signed for the deaf population in our community. So I approached Aaron Kubey of The National Theatre of the Deaf. When he asked me if I had considered using a deaf actress to play the role of Helen, I confess I was taken aback. I had not considered the possibility and the fact that it had not even entered my mind made me feel uncomfortable. How could I direct someone that could not hear me?

After meeting Jenilee Simons Marques, I knew that she had to be Helen. She had the intensity, the fierce will and the passion needed. She also had the distinct advantage of understanding a large part of Helen's world. I knew casting Jenilee would make my job more complicated, but I had no idea of the incredible joy and miracles that it would bring.

Joan Valentina:

Day 1 of rehearsal: The cast sits in a circle and each person says his or her name and tells something about themselves that we might not know upon first meeting them. Jenilee signs that she is 12, an award-winning poet, and that she is deaf.

The cast has all been told that the actress playing Helen is deaf. I suppose we had all prepared in different ways. I learned the American Sign Language

Jenilee's world. With the exception of our stage manager and the actor playing Annie Sullivan, both very good signers, most cast members still have not had a lot of interaction with Jenilee. She spends most of her breaks alone in a corner doing homework or reading. So, we all take the plunge big time. I ask her about her school (I bring the candy this time) and we have our first real conversation. One actor and Jenilee discuss music. He will bring in his guitar to give her a lesson. The younger cast members and Jenilee giggle as they look at photos of The Jonas Brothers.

Day 9: I feel that our two wonderful rehearsal interpreters, Rick Farndell and Betty Beekman, have become our life support. We seek them out to help us fully engage with Jenilee. They teach us the shortcuts of signing and they re-sign when Jenilee does not understand something we have tried to communicate. Jenilee now takes my hand and corrects my fingers when I misspell. She also writes notes when she is excited and wants to tell us something quickly. Jenilee tells us that we must all come up with a sign nickname which consists of the first letter of our name and some expression that is key to our personality. There is much laughter and hands are flying.

Day 11: Rehearsals are going

(continued on page 7)



Bianca LaVerne Jones signs in at VITA as Carol Emhoff (l) and Andrea McCullough look on. (Photo: Stephanie Masucci)

New York**VITA Opens for 34th Season**

On Monday, February 1, 2010, a long line began forming early at the Equity Office in New York. "I arrived very early and was number three in line," said AEA member Charles Hendricks. This is his third year of having his taxes prepared by VITA (Equity's Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program).

Now in its 34th season, VITA NY is the only IRS-sanctioned tax assistance program in the country specializing in performers' tax returns. Each year, VITA prepares thousands of complex federal, state and local tax returns for more than 1,800 AEA, AFTRA and SAG members. VITA volunteers will

provide free tax assistance from now through April 24 and every Thursday thereafter except holidays.

"VITA is a great program, and I am grateful free tax preparation is provided by my Union—especially since an actor's tax return is so complex. I am also grateful to Paul, who got up so early to take our names so we didn't have to wait outside in 25 degrees," said AEA member Steve Sherman.

AEA members Nick Ruggeri and Susan L. Jacks have been coming to VITA for several years. "We used to go to a commercial preparer, but switched to VITA for a couple of reasons. Of course,

we're saving money on tax prep fees, but more importantly, we feel more comfortable and confident working with VITA. The volunteers know more about 'the business' and the kinds of deductions that actors are allowed to make. We're never rushed and, as actors, they genuinely care. VITA is just an extension of everything else the Union does for us and there's a real community spirit in the room."

New York**Save the Date
for Dancers'
Event**

Career Transition For Dancers (CTFD) has scheduled its first ever full-day program, *Stepping Into Hope and Change*, on Thursday, April 8, 2010 in the Audition Center on the second floor of the Equity Building, 165 West 46th Street. In addition, the event will be streamed live, online for dancers nationwide. CTFD will be offering a full day of sessions for short-term, long-term and mid-transition career development options. For more information, visit info@careertransition.org or call (212) 764-0172.

Washington/Baltimore**Perfect Ten for Local Auditions****By Gregory Gorton**

For the third successful year, the Round House Theatre in Silver Spring, Maryland hosted the recent Washington/Baltimore Equity Regional Auditions. Sponsored by the Washington/Baltimore Equity Liaison Committee, these auditions are in their ninth very productive and popular year.

One hundred and forty-nine Equity members from this region and beyond performed for over 30 casting and artistic directors from area theatres and points north and south. Thirty-two EMCs also were seen. An excellent start for 2010.

These auditions have set a benchmark for regional auditions, with many of the auditors expressing as much enthusiasm for them as do the participating actors.

At the Annual Membership Meeting of the Liaison Committee in November, 2009, a panel of five distinguished and well-known Producing and Artistic Directors was asked how important these auditions were to them in their casting decisions. All five enthusiastically responded that they found the auditions useful and productive.

While the Equity auditions here in Washington/Baltimore have become an important casting tool for the production

community, the auditions continue to be a highlight of the season for actors bringing their three minutes of monologue and/or song to this very receptive audience. Here are some comments:

"I have already received a call from American Theatre Ensemble and Olney Theatre thanks to these auditions." – Carolyn Agan

"I received an audition from Olney Theatre for its upcoming production of *Misalliance*." – Kevin Hasser, EMC

"It was my first time auditioning and I was very impressed." – Vaughn Irving

"Since I cross between acting, directing, producing and being a mom, the AEA auditions were a great way for me to let everyone know I was back on the market." – Lee Mikesa Gardner

"I am 13 now. This was my second time auditioning. I felt like I was as an equal and a professional in every respect. At an audition like this, I feel that I am building a reputation with a very influential group of people."

– Future AEA member and Broadway star, Corrieanne Stein

We like to get them started young in the Washington/Baltimore region.

(*Gregory Gorton is a long time Equity member, veteran of many area stages and a regular contributor to Equity News.*)

Miracle At Ivyorton*Continued from page 7*

great, but Jenilee has not used her voice. We all assume she can talk, but we have never heard her voice words. The director encourages her to be verbal during the play, especially in the fight scene. We all do a group improv. The object—to express anger and frustration with our entire body and voice. Everyone is rolling on the floor, screaming, stomping and mostly just being silly. Jenilee makes the most amazing sounds. She thought we would think she sounded strange. I marvel at the fact that she has learned her language (ASL) and mine.

Opening night: Our director says in her speech that she knew doing this production would be challenging. However, she had no idea how rewarding working on the show would be for all of us. She is right. A Miracle has happened. We have come together as a cast in a most amazing way. We have all had to re-think our methods of communicating. Everyone is backstage signing cues and spelling lines. We use touch and movement. There is nothing that can keep us from communicating with Jenilee. Even the dog in the show, Argyle, gets into the act. Jenilee signs into his paw on and off stage.

I ask some of the other actors how they felt about working on this production.

Michael Raver (James Keller): Working with Jenilee was rewarding because it forced us to look past ego and self-reward and to work towards making *The Miracle Worker* into an ensemble piece. It's fascinating how something that at first seems like a disadvantage can propel a production into a place of complete unity and strength.

Andrea Maullela (Annie Sullivan): Working with Jenilee was a privilege; bringing this story to life with her, an honor. Jenilee is as hard a working actor as I have known. Her commitment, consistency, and compassion on and off the stage inspire me. What a wonderful example for young people. My hope is that she will come to find and to create work that unites our communities.

To my director, fellow cast members, stage manager and interpreters—thank you for allowing me to travel with you on a most joyous and transformative trip. To producers—please take note that you, too, can take bolder and more authentic choices when casting. We really are more alike than we know.

As Helen Keller herself said, "Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of the overcoming of it."

New York**Black History Month Celebrates Harlem**

Julia Breanetta Simpson, Councillor and co-chair with Christine Toy Johnson of the Eastern Region Equal Employment Opportunity Committee, presented a musical tribute to the Harlem Renaissance in celebration of Black History Month in New York on February 8, 2010. Played to a full house at New World Stages, Ms. Simpson's program, *Harlem On My Mind*, a musical journey from the 1910s to the '30s, included salutes to the music of Duke Ellington, Fats Waller, Bessie Smith, Ethel Waters and others. Shaunelle Perry directed, and accompaniment was provided by Musical Director Ken Levinsky (piano), Barbara Merjan (drums) and Jeff Ganz (bass). The evening, which was

**Julia Breanetta Simpson with friends and family.**

dedicated to the memory of Herb Foster Quebec, Equity Actor, staff member and EEO Committee member who died in December 2009, also included a pre-curtain dinner of

soul food catered by Bert's Catering from Bedford-Stuyvesant. Special thanks to Eastern Business Rep Pearl Brady for coordinating this event.

**Syracuse, NY****Syracuse Sets a Record**

Hats off to the casts and crew of Syracuse Stage for breaking all previous fundraising records with a total of \$25,236 raised for Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS, DePalmer House, a supportive housing program for homeless people with AIDS, and SUNY's Pediatric AIDS Center, topping the previous year's record of \$19,840. Over the course of 16

seasons, \$223,304 has been raised at Syracuse Stage. Leading the appeal for the company of *Little Women* were David Studwell, Joseph Whelan and Equity's Secretary/Treasurer Sandra Karas, who invited audiences to participate. "I said, 'These are our neighbors, these are our children, these are our friends,'" recalls Sandra. "And these are

very beautiful and empty baskets, so you must help us fill them.'" Meanwhile at the Storch Theatre, James Leaming was engaged in audience appeals of his own at his one-man show, *This Wonderful Life*. "We were thrilled with the response at both shows," says Ms. Karas, "made all the more remarkable and necessary in the midst of the floundering economy. We salute the very generous audiences in upstate New York who made this all possible."

Orlando**Change of Venue for Central Florida Meeting****Central Florida members and guests enjoy a cake decorated with the Equity logo. (Photo: Frank Zeleznik)**

The Central Florida Liaison Committee held its annual membership meeting on Monday, January 25, 2010. In attendance were the Committee, chaired by Mark Taylor; newly appointed Eastern Regional Director Rick Berg and Acting Executive Director Carol Waaser. Over 40 members attended the meeting, which was held at a new location, the Orlando Shakespeare Festival (Rita Lowndes Center). Usually held at the Orlando AEA Office, this new location was unique and decorated with festive stars and colors. The event was catered and included a champagne reception. "A great time was had by all," said Committee member and Councillor Valerie Toth-Grant.

Tails on Tour

By Kevin McMahon

A puppy? On the road? Are you out of your mind? A chorus of warnings came not only from my fellow ensemble members but from the principals, too. Joining the first National tour of *Wicked* in November of 2008, I was still stinging from the recent loss of my beloved lab mix Lily, but it was March now, and, it was time. For me, at least, life is just better with a dog. I looked around my company and seeing others not only making it work, but thriving from it, I knew it could be done. So, thinking long-term life on the road, I decided it was time to consider a touring companion. I also knew it would require an enormous amount of effort and planning. Being the researcher that I am, I poured over books and Internet pages trying to determine the exact breed that would be most suited. I weighed the option of adopting an older dog, but was advised that a puppy might be a better choice as the lifestyle I was bringing him into would become second nature and not something he would have to adjust to. I wanted something small, but not too small, one that didn't bark (much) and one that liked to exercise but wasn't crazy. The Whippet kept coming up in web searches. A Whippet? What's a Whippet? A smaller version of a Greyhound, the books said. "A sprinter, then a couch potato. Does well in apartment living and adapts well as long as they have their special person." Sounds perfect. But where do you get one of those? As luck would have it, we were in Portland and I found a local breeder who had a litter of pups ready for adoption. Enter the dog soon to be known as Seamus, a nine-week-old white brindle sweetheart. It was love at first sight.

I was fortunate to have the guidance of several pet road veterans, in particular our Dr. Dillamond, Paul Slade Smith, and our makeup supervisor, Christina Tracey, to hold my hand the first few weeks. This was my fourth puppy but my first away from home. Potty training was a bit more of a challenge,

but with the help of the friendly desk staff at the Residence Inn in Salt Lake City I was able to secure a first floor unit right near an exit for the quick puppy potty break. Thankfully, he was a quick learner.

Our tour is lucky. At this point, we have three-week minimum engagements, so the constant upheaval of the road is kept to a minimum. Within our company



(top) Clockwise: Christina Tracey, Kevin McMahon, Paul Slade Smith.

we currently have quite a menagerie - eight dogs and four cats: my Seamus; Paul Slade Smith's American Eskimo mix, Charlie; the feline trio Clementine, Frank and Marla; Christina Tracey's Jack Russell, Jetson; Stephanie Torns' Morkie, Missy Monroe; Spencer Jones and Adam Sanford's Chihuahua, Roxie; Rachel Jouzapat's Boxer, Ajax; Randy Danson's Toy Poodle, Beeper; Janet Cadmus's kitten, Maverick, who was found abandoned on a hike in Salt Lake City, and the latest addition, Merideth Kaye Clark's Goldendoodle pup, Huck.

Leaving your pet at home just isn't an option for some, and it shouldn't have to be a disqualification for joining a tour or taking a long-term job at a regional theatre. Where there is a will there is a way, but understand that you may have to make some serious sacrifices, both personally and financially to make this work. Seamus is now almost a year old and is thriving on the road. We have, however, learned a few things.

Do:

- Have a Plan B: Not all pets will do well with the constant changes of tour life. Have a family member or close friend whom you trust that is willing

and able to take over temporarily, or maybe even full time, if your animal companion is not thriving or happy in this environment.

- Expect to adjust your social activity: Your pet becomes the priority outside of the show. Walks between performances may prevent you from trying the latest hot restaurant and opening night parties may be

limited or curtailed when you have a dog in a hotel room waiting for you. (Their happy face beats the steam table food any day - even if it is free!)

- Check your contract: Some riders specifically prohibit pets. If management is providing housing and

specific travel (not per diem and travel reimbursement) they are within their rights.

- Assume you are now on your own as far as travel and housing: You can't expect your company management to make any pet arrangements for you. That includes booking your pet on the company flight. Some airlines have restrictions on how many pets can fly on each flight. It is up to you to make these arrangements or find alternative travel. Also, don't expect management to find hotels that accept pets. Often, a pet friendly hotel is an option, but they are in no way contractually obligated to find these terms for you. Many websites are available that narrow your search to these pet friendly hotels or short-term vacation properties.

- Expect to pay more: Most hotels and nearly all short-term rentals require extra fees or deposits for pets. If you will be flying with your pet, expect to pay between \$75 - \$150 each way to have your animal onboard whether they are with you in the cabin or in a crate in cargo. You may also need to arrange your own transport to and from the airport, as you can't expect to take your pet on any bus provided by the company.

- Cultivate a group of pet owners and pet lovers who you can rely on for support. Sometimes, with vacations, understudy rehearsals and put ins, it does take a village.

- Consider the size of your pet: Some hotels don't take dogs over 30 lbs. Animals over 20 lbs or those that can't fit easily into an under the seat carrier will have to fly as cargo. That can be stressful for your animal and to you.

- Consider driving the tour: Because of travel restrictions, many of us with pets have decided to drive the tour. Not only will you have greater flexibility with your pet once you arrive, you can expand your housing options to pet friendly properties outside the theatre radius. However, you need to consider your itinerary and know that you can safely make the drive in the time allocated.

road, it presents a whole new challenge. Also, an older pet may not be as flexible as she once was. Some animals become stressed with new environments; some could care less as long as you are around. Only you can determine if your pet is a good candidate for this lifestyle.

Don't:

- Take any pet on the road if you aren't comfortable with any of this.

As any pet guardian knows, the rewards of having an animal companion are astounding. Some of my best memories so far revolve around the adventures we've taken with our little "Wicked pack." Hiking in Utah, evening strolls along the river walk in San Antonio, sailing in Seattle, sunning on the dog beach in San Diego and romping in the snow in Denver. Something else



From l: Jetson, Charlie, Seamus.

- Talk to the local dressers and crew about good vets, doggie day care and reliable pet sitters. Good doggie day care is a lifesaver on two show days! They're exhausted and you know they've had a good day, even without you. Don't ever expect to bring your pet to the theatre with you.

- Consider the age and temperament of your pet: While potty training is possible on the

happens too; the bubble of tour life gets bursts a little more often when you have something outside yourself and your show to focus on. Cast morale is up when the pets are around. I think that's a good thing. It keeps us emotionally balanced and it's not only healthy for us, but for the show that we are proudly out here to do. Everyone wins. And, you might get a sloppy kiss, too.

Douglas Gordon Dies

Douglas Gordon, a member of Equity for more than 60 years and a Principal Councillor for 12 years died on December 18, 2009 at the age of 90. Mr. Gordon joined the Council in 1975 and during his tenure served on the Production Contract Committee, Equity News Editorial Board, Agency

and Ethnic Minority Committees, among others. He also was active in advancing the concept of a National Theatre of the United States, served as the Chair of Equity's National Theatre Committee for seven years and wrote Equity's Declaration of Intent for a National Theatre.

Letters

continued from page 2

of glory. I initially met Alaina in 1969; hers was the siren voice of "My Body Is Walking In Space" in the Chicago production of *Hair*. I was Dance Captain and understudy to "Hud." Then, Alaina was known as "Tiny," the lead vocalist for a racially mixed rock band called Marble Cake. Eventually, "Tiny" would reluctantly reveal her birth name as Bernice.

My friends' children were

partly reared by Alaina in her guise as "Olivia" on *Sesame Street*; much of America was entertained by Alaina's robust sense of humor as the character "Rose Lee Holloway" on the television sitcom, *227*, and the Broadway community will recall Alaina's precedent setting turn as the first African American actor to portray "Mama," opposite Chita Rivera and Gwen Verdon, in the original production of Bob Fosse's *Chicago*.

Alaina was also a mother,

and is survived by her two adopted children, André (my namesake) and Tanya Cook. Alaina married three times—Richard Cook, Kevin Peter Hall and Tamim Amini. She is remembered as a massively talented, tremendously generous and profoundly complicated individual, and those of us who miss her commend her spirit to the Christian God whom she served unfalteringly.

However, my lasting recollection of Alaina will

forever be as the reigning queen of the New York cabaret circuit during the passionate 1970s. Her inimitable act was billed as Alaina Reed and the Diva Patrol (myself and Arnold McCuller). Alaina wore custom tailored gowns that would cascade down her chocolate Amazon frame like a glacial meltdown. And the entire effect was finished with closely cropped Afro. Her vocal quality was unmatched. When Lonnie Youngblood wasn't wailing with Junior Walker or Chuck Berry, I

do believe his tenor sax vacationed in Alaina's vocal chords.

Many of her admirers continue to reel from the stunning news of her passing. On behalf of all of us who were fortunate enough to be anointed with her vitality, I wish Bernice "Tiny" Alaina Reed-Cook-Hall-Amini joy immeasurable in her new and greatest adventure.

Ajé.

André De Shields
New York