

SMC's Children's Theater Production—Whose Porridge is too Hot?

By Andrea A. Firth



Michael Cook (left) works with sophomores Michael Matar (center) and Blaine Badasci as they build the set for SMC's stage adaptation of Goldilocks and the Three Bears
Photo Andrea A. Firth

Each January, Saint Mary's College faculty member Michael Cook puts himself and a handful of students on a "theater production treadmill" as they race to build sets and learn lines, songs and choreography for the annual performance of a classic children's fairytale. Part of Saint Mary's January term course offerings—Creating Theater for Young Adults—presents a musical adaptation seen by over 2,700 area children. "It's more like Summer Stock. It's down and dirty," explains Cook. "The students re-

turn from their holiday break and hit the boards running."

Over the past several years, the productions have featured well-read children's fairy tales such as *The Princess and the Pea*, *Cinderella*, and *Hansel and Gretel*. Cook starts the process by taking the two-page fairytale and crafting a 45-minute stage adaptation. His wife, Jeffra, a musician and composer, creates original music for the play that is written for the individual actors. The course is open to any undergraduate student and usually

draws a handful of theater majors along with several students who little or no theater experience.

Cook, who is also the Technical Director of LeFevre Theater, spends half of each school day during the course working with the group of students responsible for building the set and props. Prior to taking the class, many students have no experience using power tools, so Cook makes safety as a priority and leads his crew to the completion of a professional-looking set that he has

designed. The remainder of each day is spent in rehearsals. Rehearsal time is condensed to two weeks versus the eight weeks of practice that theater students are accustomed to for productions done during the regular school year.

Saint Mary's has established a strong relationship with schools in Lamorinda and throughout the East Bay with their Children's Theater performances, and local school groups return year after year for these charming productions. In addition, Theater Coordinator Sharon Cahill works with teachers whose students will attend the shows to extend the learning experience. "We provide the teachers with a list of vocabulary words that the students will hear in the play that may be to new them. Examples might include words such as metaphorically, landlord, or tenants. Teachers can then review the meaning of these words with their students prior to the show."

Almost all of the 10 performances for this year's production—*Goldilocks and the Three Bears* are sold out. However, you can still catch the show on Thursday, January 31st at 4 pm. Tickets are \$8 per person. Reservations and advance purchase are requested; call 925-631-4670.