

Cal Shakes Volunteers Keep Popular Venue Running Smoothly

By Jennifer Wake

Each summer, as hundreds of theater lovers gather in eager anticipation for the opening of California Shakespeare Theater, behind the scenes a small army of dedicated individuals helps to put it all together. Celebrating its 34th season, Cal Shakes offers a unique interpretation of Shakespeare and the classics in its outdoor venue, and runs with clockwork precision thanks to its artists, actors, designers, and staff – and to its local volunteers.

When Bentley High School senior Mandy Goldstone-Dahlin began volunteering at Cal Shakes three years ago, she did so simply to get community service credit. She continues to volunteer at the Cal Shakes administrative offices (making copies, shrink wrap books and doing other administrative duties) because theater is her passion and she loves being immersed in all aspects of it. “Coming into contact with the professional world of theater in a new way has enriched my interest and love of theater all the more,” she said.

“Our volunteer corps represents a wide demographic,” said Cal Shakes Administrative Project Manager Elizabeth Schrey. “They are mothers and daughters, fathers and sons, friends, co-workers, book club members, young and old. There does not seem to be a limit to the diversity of our volunteers and it is amazing. Volunteers are an extension of our organization.”

This past year, Schrey said many volunteers were new to the



A Cal Shakes actor performs at Theater Square last year

Photo Tod Fierner

theater. “Many of the new volunteers had never been to a production before,” she said. “It’s an introduction to theater for some, a love of theater for others, and others just come because of a love for their community.”

Cal Shakes needs associates to help run the Theater Store, selling merchandise and doing product research, and needs 10 to 15 volunteer ushers at each of its 96 performances over the summer. This year’s playbill includes: Pericles, An Ideal Husband, Uncle Vanya, and Twelfth Night.

One of the biggest benefits for volunteer ushers, says Schrey, is the opportunity to see the shows for free on the nights they usher. Normally, tickets for Cal Shakes range from

\$32 to \$62, depending upon the day of the week and availability, so this benefits people who have a love of theater but cannot afford a chance to see great theater.

Administrative volunteers work in the Berkeley office, which is located in the same building as the rehearsal hall. They can occasionally sneak into watch a rehearsal when possible. And for those interested in helping out, but who don’t want to work outdoors, there are myriad volunteer opportunities at the Cal Shakes Annual Gala event – a black tie affair that raised more than \$300,000 for the organization last year through its live auction, silent auction and donations.

Goldstone-Dahlin recommends volunteering at Cal Shakes

without hesitation. “I love the people; everyone is friendly and warm, and they all share my passion for theater. Getting to chat with the actors has also been a mind-blowing experience – I have seen firsthand what thriving, professional actors are truly like,” she said. “If you have any interest in theater, I guarantee that the people you will meet and the activities you will do will inspire you and brighten your day.”

For more information about volunteer opportunities, or to learn more about California Shakespeare’s Season, Education Program and New Works/New Communities Program, please visit the Cal Shakes Web site at www.calshakes.org.