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Leave 'em Laf-fing: Laffrantics Cast Recalls the Good Old Days

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From left: Marge Stalker, Melba Luna, Dian Overly, Carol Finney and Dick Smith

Photo provided

After seeing their first show, Day and her husband went backstage. He saw the look in her eyes and knew she was hooked, saying, "Oh no, you want to be up there [on stage]!"

"I was always in the chorus," said Day modestly, who remembers rehearsing in Lafayette's old Veteran's Hall while her husband babysat their children.

A Tear for Tatters was the Laffrantics first production. It ran four nights, and tickets cost \$1.50. The playbill contained more than 60 local ads, including those for Moraga Record Album, Lafayette Sea Food Grotto and Les McFetridge Buick.

In 1986, after a 30-year run, Laffrantics called it quits. It was time for the final curtain call. Cast members estimate Laffrantics had 473 participants over the years. The group went out on a high note, still playing to standing-room-only crowds.

"Our group is fast depleting," explained Nelson, who is now 90. Dick Abel felt the group was getting too

old for the rigors of performing; still, his wife Barbara said, "We all cried a lot when it ended."

CCI never built the community center for which they raised funds. When Lafayette decided to convert a former elementary school into its community center, CCI deeded their parcel at 711 St. Mary's Road to the city. That land is now known as Buckeye Fields.

Fortunately, the saga of Laffrantics lives on in weathered news clippings, photographs and handbills. Former cast members keep their own thick scrap books; some, including Nelson, have donated memorabilia to Lafayette Historical Society.

A 2011 video documentary by Paul and Glenda Fillingner shows the Laffrantics camaraderie that continues to this day. Remaining cast members still meet, as they have for 26 years, for an early December reunion brunch. After a 30-year run, they certainly deserve an encore.

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Laffrantics Melodramas, 1956-1986

1956 A Tear for Tatters	1972 Curses, Soiled Again
1957 Slippery When Wet or Frost	1973 Camelittle
1958 Come Back, Jack	1974 Three for Jack and Ready to Go
1959 Search for a Penny or Tither's Long Look	1975 How the West Was Too
1960 Trial La Law	1976 ABCDCIA
1961 Hello Dere my Fren	1977 Fangs for the Mem'ries
1962 Toss Lightly and Serve, or He ain't Done Well by Nell	1978 FrantikAntiks
1963 Her Fatal Beauty	1979 The Lure of the Lumberlust
1964 Under the Gaslight	1980 The Matchmaker's Daughter
1965 Sheer Follies of 1933	1981 Tillie the Teller or The Great Bank Robbery
1966 Fireman, Save my Child	1982 The Farce be With You
1967 Up, Up and Away	1983 Camelittle
1968 Curses on my Fatal Beauty	1984 How the West Was
1969 Curse You Jack Dalton	1985 Medic Heir
1970 The Lure of the Lumberlust	1986 One More Time
1971 Bewitched	



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