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## 2013 Annual Arts and Culture Commission Awards Announced

Submitted by Darwin Marable



From left: Candace Andersen, District II Supervisor, Corey Mason, James Phillip Wright, Eugene Rodriguez (Los Cenzontles), John Gioia, District I Supervisor and Federal Glover, District V Supervisor and chair of the Board of Supervisors.

Photo Raj Bhandari

The Arts and Culture Commission of Contra Costa County (AC5) and the County Board of Supervisors honored two individuals and an organization Oct. 22 at the County Administration Building in Martinez for their continuing contributions to the arts and culture of the county. For the past 17 years the Arts Recognition Award has honored individuals, institutions, organizations and businesses that have made significant contributions to the arts and culture of Contra Costa County and beyond over a sustained period of time. The awardees for 2013 are James Phillip Wright, architect, Corey Mason, cultural promoter and educator, and Los Cenzontles Mexican Arts Center.

When James Phillip Wright purchased the 123-year-old "Old Yellow House," as it was originally known, at 209 Moraga Way in Orinda he had a vision for the house, both exterior and interior. After consulting with the Orinda Historical Landmarks Committee, Wright is restoring and modifying it as close as possible to its original form and color combined with some modern innovations. He plans to use the historical building as a residence and an office.

Wright graduated from the University of Maryland and has been a practicing architect for 31 years. He was inspired by the organic architecture of the Spaniard, Antonio Gaudi, after a trip to Spain. Wright has been an architect in California since 1988 working in Lafayette, Bel Air, Carmel, Monterey, San Francisco,

Lake Almanor and others. His creativity and innovative work in integrating modern materials and the latest energy efficient methods with architecture are both creative and unique.

Corey Mason is an educator at El Cerrito High School where he is the founder/director of worldOneradio WCCUSD Public Radio 88.1 keCg 97.7 since 1995 which both educates and engages the community while promoting global awareness through music, culture, nature and technology. He also teaches radio courses at El Cerrito High School. In addition, since 1998 as festival director of worldOne radio and festival in El Cerrito, he has promoted cultural diversity.

Los Cenzontles Mexican Arts Center in Richmond provides innovative arts programs which celebrate the beauty of Mexican American culture. The Arts Academy provides cultural education in traditional and popular arts, music, dance and crafts. The Academy also educates more than 250 students annually while the Youth Mentorship Program builds lifelong skills and encourages students to become teachers.

Each honoree received a commemorative glass sculpture representing the flame of creativity created by the internationally recognized artist Randy Strong of R. Strong Glass, Berkeley from the Arts Commission and a resolution from the Board of Supervisors honoring their accomplishments.

## High Schoolers Take the Stage in Upcoming Fall Productions

Miramonte's 'Our Town' opens tonight

By Clare Varellas



Miramonte High School "Our Town" cast and crew members, front row, from left: Michael Thuesen, James Gammon, Maritza Grillo, Maya Konstantino, Elena Wasserman, Nate Lloyd, Ian Cowles, and Colin Mooney. Middle row: Teala Volkamer, Caitlin Kozicki, Olivia Madsen, Andy Tobin, Katherine Smith, Lauren Thuesen, Julia Young, Anita Levin, Carl Deaton, and Max Hunt. Back row: Zach Brooks, Daniel Cook, Dylan Watson, and Elizabeth Chenok.

Photos Andy Schreck

If you walk into the Acalanes High School theater after school on a typical weekday this month, you will find several students perched high on ladders painting a set, leading actors running lines, and the drama teacher making detailed plans. A production is in progress, as are the fall plays at both Miramonte and Campolindo high schools.

Students at all three schools have been hard at work on these performances since September, and in the coming weeks their efforts and time spent will finally come to fruition as the students hold their official performances. Each school's fall play is unique in its own right, as are the methods in which students and directors have chosen to carry out their individual productions.

Opening tonight, 75 years after Thornton Wilder's "Our Town" was written, Miramonte High School drama students will perform the three-act play, which depicts simple life in a small town and life's simple pleasures. But the most interesting aspect of their production is its minimalist backdrop, which only includes two ladders.

"This minimalism allows the focus to be on the acting, and my student actors are really getting to sharpen their mime skills – an important tool for any actor or storyteller," said Miramonte drama teacher and director Heather Cousins. "The cast also creates all of the live sound effects."

In addition to its unique staging, "Our Town" will be performed on a stage surrounded on three sides by audience members. Cousins says this method is used to create a more intimate play-watching experience.

"The exchange between actor and audience is critical in any theatrical production," said Cousins. "However, this relationship is highlighted in our production. There are times when the fourth wall is struck down entirely and the audience is asked to participate and become a part of the story."

Stage managers Daniel Cook and Elizabeth Chenok will oversee the production, which features Sam Shain and Nate Lloyd as George and Maritza Grillo, Maya Konstantino, and Elena Wasserman as Emily. "Our Town" will be shown at 7 p.m. Wednesday through Friday, Nov. 6-8 at the Miramonte theater.

Campolindo's play "We Scene Us" takes an even more unique approach to traditional theater as a compilation of eight different stand-alone scenes centered around the theme of "human beings finding themselves and finding others."

"These scenes run the gambit of the human condition: audiences will see boys meeting to discuss if it's time to start 'liking' girls, a psychic having relationship problems, a couple's anxiety ridden moment as they are about to cross the threshold, and so on," said Campolindo drama teacher and director Jamie Donohoe. "A lot of humor and a lot of charm."

Scenes last for seven to 15 minutes each, so the audience will be constantly entertained by new action onstage. Donohoe says one of the best aspects of the play is the way it highlights certain comical human characteristics all people have, even if they didn't realize it before.

"There are many 'aha' moments, moments of truth and many of those moments produce real laughter – you're laughing at something you recognize to be true about yourself," said Donohoe.

"We Scene Us" will take the stage at 7 p.m. Friday and Saturday, Nov. 8-9 at Town Hall Theatre in Lafayette,

as Campolindo's theater is currently undergoing construction.

Acalanes' play, "The Man Who Came to Dinner," written by George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart, is a classic, comical production from the late 1930s. The play tells the story of a popular, well-known radio personality who falls and injures himself at a dinner party, and is detained from leaving the host's house for some time. Acalanes drama teacher Ed Meehan says he chose the play for the drama students to perform because it includes many different characters who are guests at the dinner, and their presence makes the play more lively.

"There are a whole bunch of wacky support characters that come in and make everyone laugh and leave," said Meehan.

But though the humor of "The Man Who Came to Dinner" is still relevant, Acalanes actor Grant Gerber, who plays the leading role of Sheridan Whiteside, says he likes the play's 1940s air, which the drama class has worked hard to keep intact in their production through accurate sets, costumes, and linguistics in the script.

"This play doesn't have a modern feel," said Gerber. "This one is blatantly set in the 1940s, so the biggest challenge has been having to adjust to the language use and getting the words and the verbiage right. That's what really sets it apart."

Leads for the Acalanes play include Gerber as Whiteside, Jess Kallen as Maggie Cutler, Danny Igoe as Bert Jefferson, and Izzy Parkinson-Morgan as Lorraine Sheldon. "The Man Who Came to Dinner" will be performed at 7 p.m. Nov. 13-16 at Acalanes High School's Little Theater.

"Our Town" seating is limited to just 80 people per night, so purchase tickets on the Miramonte High School web store at [miramonte.revtrak.net/tek9.asp](http://miramonte.revtrak.net/tek9.asp). Tickets for "We Scene Us" are available online at the Town Hall Theatre website at [www.townhalltheatre.com/tickets/single-tickets](http://www.townhalltheatre.com/tickets/single-tickets). And tickets for "The Man Who Came to Dinner" are available at [dramadons.org](http://dramadons.org).

## As Seen in Lamorinda ... Bus Stop Blues



Photo Cathy Dausman

The remnants of a resident-built school bus stop perched precariously on a Lafayette hillside fell into disrepair over the last five to eight years, says Todd Gritzer. Gritzer attended Stanley Middle School in the 1950s, when he helped his neighbors build the shelter. "There were about 10 kids on our block," he says, and they used it all the time. One of the neighbors owned a lumber yard, he adds, and that's where the materials came from. C. Dausman



From left: Nate Lloyd, Daniel Cook and Maya Konstantino