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Theater camp with a bilingual twist offers cultural exposure

BY KALIE WOODEN

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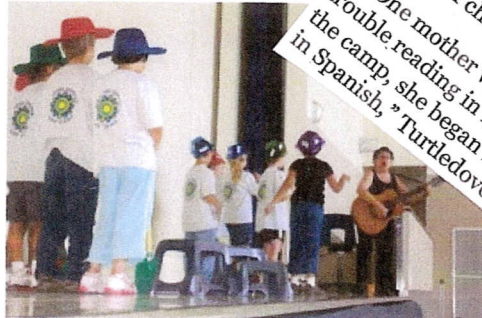
The Cedar Hills Recreation Center will be a place of learning and cultural appreciation next week as children ages 6 to 11 gather for a unique, bilingual musical theater camp.

The camp begins Monday, Aug. 3, and provides aspiring, young actors with an opportunity to improve Spanish and English language skills through the excitement that comes from bringing a theatrical production to the stage.

The increased popularity of Cyndi Turtledove's bilingual musical theater camps has led to the opening of several camp sessions at both the Cedar Hills Recreation Center and the Hart Theater in Hillsboro.

At the summer camps, children of mixed ages and backgrounds will learn basic Spanish and English by performing a bilingual play with music, dance, crafts and participation in theater exercises.

LESTA recently received a grant from the Hillsboro Arts and Culture Council to help fund sponsorship camp registrations for low-income families, as well as fund materials for the bilingual theater camps at the Hart Theatre.



KALIE WOODEN / BEAVERTON VALLEY TIMES
BEHIND THE SCENES — Director Cyndi Turtledove leads a song about the directions during a recent bilingual musical theater camp.

Focus on fun

Turtledove began writing her plays in Mazatlan, Mexico, where she taught English to handicapped students of all ages.

Turtledove's plays usually take a common story, such as "The Elephant Calf," and twist it into a combination of simple lines and songs in Spanish and English.

This summer's featured play, "El Tesoro: The Treasure of Sierra's Padre," breaks the students into four groups; the miners, the sheriffs (la guardia), the sign family and the moles (los topos).

"The main questions the play brings up are: Do the miners find the treasure? What is the treasure, and how do they find it? To find out, come see the free camp performance at the end of each session," Turtledove said.

When it comes to Turtledove's goals for the children involved in the camp, she said, "The main focus is for kids to have fun learning a new language or improving a language they already have, as well as making new friends from a different culture."

The bilingual summer camps are open to children looking to learn Spanish as a second language, as well as students who want to hone their English-language skills.

The camp also brings together children from different backgrounds and cultures, giving them a chance to gain a new understanding and appreciation for each other while working toward a common goal of putting on a performance.

Bringing children from other cultures together is important to Turtledove.

"The Anglo kids learn to respect the Latino kids because they realize that the Latino children of the same age speak two languages, and the Latino kids gain confidence because they can help the other kids learn Spanish," Turtledove explained.

In combination with the bilingual theater camps, Turtledove is the artistic director of LESTA (Learn English and Spanish through the Arts), a nonprofit organization that "strives to bring Latino and Anglo students together through theater, dance, music and crafts."

was so much fun with the cute characters and songs so it motivated her to read like she had never been motivated before."

Turtledove has offered 20 bilingual theater camps in the Beaverton and Hillsboro areas since 2005.

It's not too late for families to enroll their children in this summer's remaining three camps.

"The arts in general are a wonderful and fun motivator for kids to improve their language skills or anything else they set their mind to," Turtledove said.

Sounds like fun, sign me up

BILINGUAL MUSICAL THEATER CAMPS —
HART Theater, 185 S.E. Washington St., Hillsboro. Learn English/Spanish Through the Arts. Cost: \$65. Register by Aug. 3. ■ Aug. 10-14, 1-4 p.m., ages 6-9; Aug. 17-21, 1-4 p.m., ages 9-12.

Motivation to read
Aside from the benefit of learning a second language, theater helps kids improve their self-esteem.
"Theater and dance help students gain courage and self-confidence while in front of an audience," Turtledove said. "And, having other students up there with them, helps their teamwork, cooperation and problem solving skills, too."
"I teach the kids a lot of improvisation games and songs that help them with the new vocabulary included in the script."
The bilingual theater camps have also had a great response from the parents of children involved.
"One mother wrote me a letter about her 7-year-old daughter who had trouble reading in English, but she had so much fun reading the scripts at the camp, she began reading much faster in English, and for the first time in Spanish," Turtledove recalled. "It was all because of the motivation — it