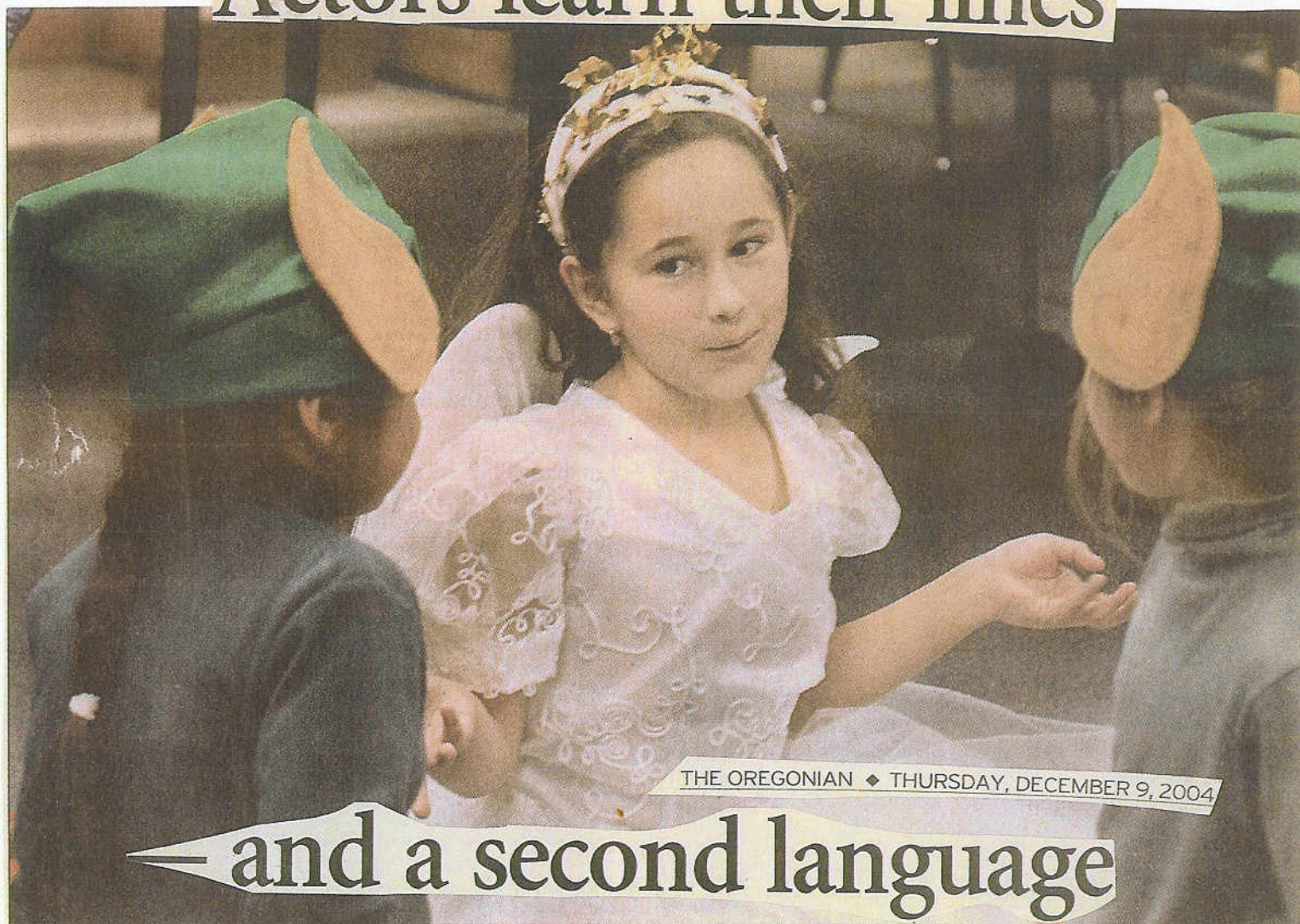


Actors learn their lines



THE OREGONIAN ♦ THURSDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2004

— and a second language

Photos by DANA E. OLSEN/THE OREGONIAN

Xochitl Camacho, (center) a fourth-grader at Cornelius Elementary School, rehearses her part as an angel in "A Cornelius Christmas Posada" with elves Xochitl Maria Contreras, 5 (left), and Oceana Lee, 5.



Playwright Cyndi Turtledove accompanies Cornelius Elementary School students on the guitar at a rehearsal for "A Cornelius Christmas Posada" earlier this week. The children will perform at the first production of the Cornelius Bilingual Theatre Club starting this weekend.

The Oregonian

THURSDAY

December 9, 2004

Cornelius' new theater club for schoolchildren prepares for the debut of a one-of-a-kind Christmas play

By **SOPHIA TAREEN**
THE OREGONIAN

CORNELIUS — Elves, reindeer, angels and little devils will take the stage this weekend, opening the first production of The Cornelius Bilingual Theatre Club.

Founded by veteran actor, director and teacher Cyndi Turtledove, the club involves about 30 children from Forest Grove and Cornelius schools.

"The arts are the best way to teach anything," Turtledove said. "They are the way we learn naturally in every culture."

Turtledove, who lived in Mexico teaching bilingual theater for nearly two decades, hopes the play will help to better integrate Cornelius' growing Latino population.

She wants to someday develop the club into a bilingual school of the arts.

"The whole hemisphere, it's getting more and more connected," she said. "This is part of reducing the fears everyone has."

The play, called "A Cornelius Christmas Posada" — or inn — will be performed Saturday and Tuesday at Centro Cultural in Cornelius. The show is a fusion of Mexican and American Christmas cultural traditions, along with wacky plot twists and environmental activism.

Take the devils, for instance. Many Mexican Christmas stories have the little nuisance characters who get in the way of Santa.

In this original play by Turtledove, they steal Santa's hat.

The plot involves some traditional American Christmas story ideas, such as Santa and his reindeer doling out gifts to children, but Turtledove has added other characters, such as a mechanic who fixes Santa's broken sleigh, and the River Patrol.

Yes, that's right, a River Patrol.

They scan the waters looking for fish, but the river has become so contaminated that only one is left.

Santa must grant the gift of clean water awareness so they can prevent it from happening again.

The children sing "Silent Night" and "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" in both languages, and they also will parody a popular Spanish song called "Solamente Una Vez," or "Only Once," with "Solamente Un Pez," or "Only One Fish."

At a song rehearsal earlier this week, children at Cornelius Elementary school practiced the parody.

Waving two blue fabric "rivers" that have been contaminated with hand-drawn "garbage," two groups of children took turns singing songs in English and Spanish.

Turtledove, wearing green tights, green shoes, a green shirt and red vest, accompanied the children on guitar.

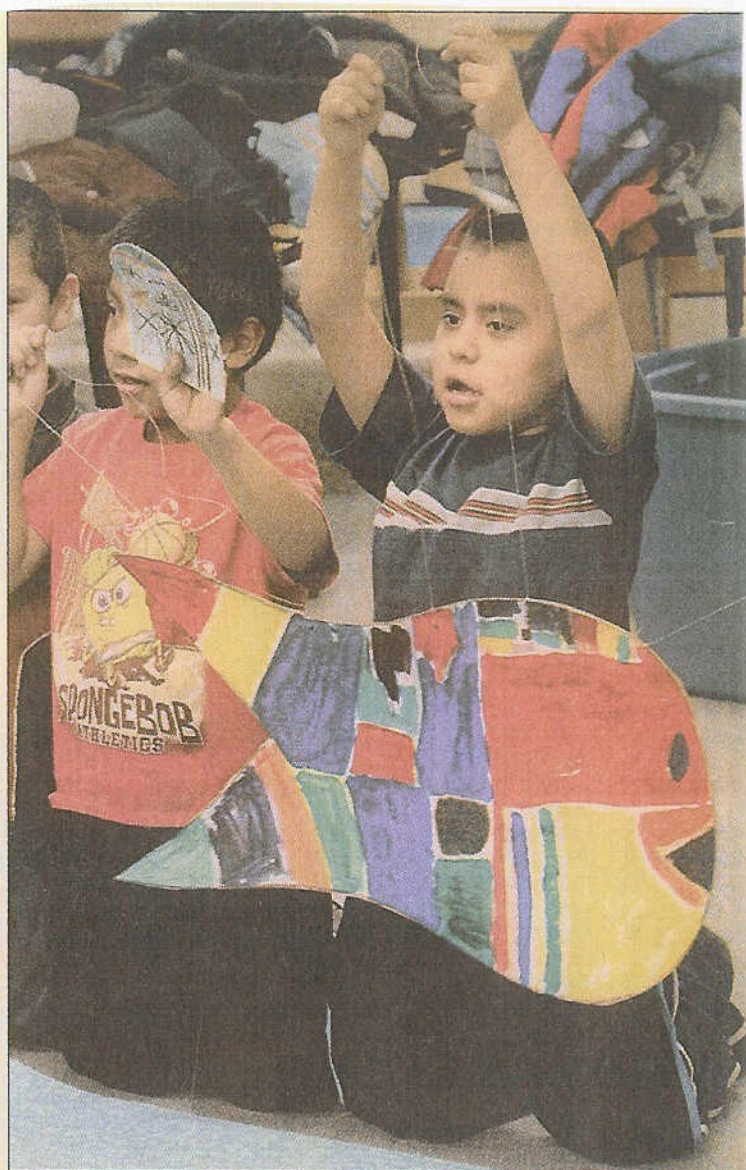
First one side shouted in English: "Contaminated with yucky things that shouldn't be there."

Then the other side shouted the same in Spanish: "Contaminado con guacala cosas que no debe estar."

Turtledove also teaches language groups after school at Cornelius Elementary School. Students from the groups, though separate from the theater club, will also participate in the production this weekend.

"We always look for ways to incorporate language learning," said Perla Rodriguez, Cornelius Elementary School's principal and parent of two children in the show. "The same is true of the arts."

The theater club has been meeting Saturday mornings to practice for the productions.



Cornelius Elementary School students Daniel Lucas (left) and Daniel Antrado sing about the single fish left in a contaminated river for the first production of the Cornelius Bilingual Theatre Club.

Parent Stephanie Oppenlander, who is Latina, plays the part of Mrs. Claus in the play.

"Heritage-wise, it's important for my kids," Oppenlander said. "I want them to know it's a part of their culture."

Luz Martinez of Cornelius brought her daughter Siera, 6.

She and her husband speak primarily English at home with their two daughters but want them to become more bilingual.

"We try to find opportunities for her to hear more Spanish," she said of Siera. "I like that the play is bilingual and both languages are equal."

Siera has her own ideas of what she likes about the play.

"It's fun to be a reindeer," she said, skipping in place. "You pick up your knees."

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IF YOU GO

What: "A Cornelius Christmas Posada," an original play in Spanish and English performed by The Cornelius Bilingual Theatre Club.

When: Saturday at 10 a.m. and Tuesday at 7 p.m.

Where: Centro Cultural, 1110 N. Adair St., Cornelius

Cost: Free

Information: Cyndi Turtledove, 503-617-6986