

This Beaverton entertainer and educator never misses an opportunity to advocate for the arts

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GAIL PARK/The Times

Cyndi Turtledove, armed with her guitar and a lifetime of big ideas about music, language and the arts.

Cyndi Turtledove

By GAIL PARK

Funding cuts change people's lives. When the cuts have involved the arts, Cyndi Turtledove vigorously faces the challenge.

During the 1980s, when schools all over the nation were in dire financial need, theater, art and music took a huge blow. Turtledove's lifelong work to fill people's lives with upbeat entertainment would be devastated by the hit. Fiscal inadequacies would stand in the way of the momentous strides the entertainer/educator had made since 1972 when she earned her masters of fine arts from the University of California at Los Angeles.

Right out of college, the enthusiastic thespian felt the effects of the education system's inability to balance its books. Near Los Angeles in 1977, the Pasadena School District was forced to stop its contract with Turtledove and her Synthaxias Theater Company, an experience

she drew from in Edinburgh, Scotland, to teach language skills, English, spelling and other non-drama subjects.

"It was highly successful," says the Beaverton resident who wrote, directed and performed in the dramas. "The arts are always cut first whenever there are any budget cuts on any level."

From a young age, she had poised herself for success, and her theatrical resume began to grow. Performing, dancing and singing from age 8, she lived to entertain.

Born to Portland native Leo Turtledove, a Hollywood motion picture agent, and Texan Joy Greenberg, a lawyer, she grew up on the fringe of Hollywood. Encouraged to study guitar, sing and dance, she soon found her purpose. Her grandmother, from Granada, Spain, would influence her to learn Folklorico, Spanish and the flamenco. (She went on to traverse the globe performing on cruise ships.)

In Oregon in 1986, under the cloud of a troubled school system, the Jefferson High School educator, Mount Hood Community College theater department teacher and part-time TAG instructor for the Portland Public Schools packed her bags and headed to Mexico to improve her Spanish and to write. During the three-month summer break she planned a personal intermission.

"I had no idea I would stay in Mexico 18 years," says the energetic artist, who turns 69 this month.

In Mexico, the dedicated educator quickly discovered that she could support herself by writing, directing and performing. She created a dinner theater and entertained "gringos" who lived or vacationed in San Miguel de Allende, a famous art colony. By charging \$2 or \$3 for admission to the show, she made enough to make ends meet.

'I survived on that'

For two years, she recalls, "Believe it or not, I survived on that and a bit of English teaching."

One job led to another, and in 1999 she became the director of the Staff Development Center under the Secretary of Public Education for the state of Sinaloa, Mexico. She won awards training educators how to use the theater arts to assist in teaching languages.

She drew together student teachers to work with her on her "Handicapped Student Theater in English as a Second Language Projects." Together they taught stu-

SURVIVORS

STORIES OF HOPE, CHALLENGE & ACCOMPLISHMENT

PORTRAIT 2007

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Cyndi Turtledove



(Submitted photo)

In 1969, at age 31, Cyndi Turtledove (right) performed during the P&O Iberia Ship and Princess Italia Ship cruises to Europe.

dents in wheelchairs English through theater, music and dance.

Mazatlan's heat began to get to the tireless woman, who weaves vocal expression, movement, yoga and dance into her daily life. Two years ago, her son, Gregg Wooden, believed the growing Hispanic population in his hometown of Beaverton would open doors for his mom. He encouraged her to move back to Oregon.

The walls of Turtledove's apartment, across from the Tualatin Hills Park and Recreation District headquarters, are covered with articles, photos and mementos of the friends and students she has met along her journey. But, her return to Beaverton has not been entirely fulfilling.

Though honored by the Teachers Standards and Practices Commission as the first person in Oregon's

history to receive Oregon teaching certificates in theater based on professional theater experience, her BS and MFA degrees, upon her return the commission informed Turtledove they could not renew her certificates. She was told if she wanted to teach again she would have to go back to college and take education courses.

The bilingual arts

Turtledove has endured by tutoring Spanish and English through Bruce's Language School and A Grade Tutoring and leading an imaginative bilingual musical theater course at the Cedar Hills Recreation Center through THPRD. She also privately tutors and teaches music and yoga.

Every day she strives to attract interest in the bilingual arts. She has formed LESTA (Learn English and Spanish Through the Arts), a nonprofit corporation, and is looking for serious volunteers to become community board members.

"Believe me, when I get LESTA and its board of directors going, I will be in 100 percent better position, not just to pay myself a full-time wage but to hire other experienced actor/teachers," says Turtledove, insisting it is possible to "create bilingual education projects which the public schools do

not have to pay for."

If Turtledove's drive is as infectious as her ability to pass her enthusiasm on to students in her THPRD class, audiences will continue to see her family-friendly performances. Once again she will be able to earn a meaningful living in the United States — right here in our community.

Everyone is welcome to see the culmination of Turtledove's course, "The Crabs who Played with the Sea," on Saturday, March 17, at 11 a.m. The free presentation, which alternates between Spanish and English, is at the Cedar Hills Recreation Center.

Her unyielding dream to teach by utilizing students' creative juices has constantly been challenged but never defeated.