

BREA-LA HABRA STAR-PROGRESS

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“ I really wanted to have a program filled with well-rounded kids. I just want kids to do what they feel good about.”

BRIAN JOHNSON
LA HABRA HIGH PERFORMING ARTS TEACHER

STAR IS BORN

La Habra High's theater program has grown to become one of the top in the country.

BY LOUIS CASIANO JR.
STAFF WRITER

When performing arts teacher Brian Johnson came to La Habra High School in 2004, the school's theater program was all but nonexistent.

The school was primarily known for its outstanding football teams.

“They didn't really have a program. There were a couple of (drama) classes and they were doing one or two shows a year,” Johnson said. “We're (now) trying to create a professional-quality theater and trying to produce theater year-round.”

In the decade since, Johnson formed the La Habra High School Theater Guild, which is now recog-

nized as one of the best high school theaters in the nation.

Wanting to compete with Fullerton Union High School's Academy of the Arts program, Johnson said he decided to form his own.

First, he needed a name that sounded prestigious and would lend itself to the arts.

“I realized, at the time, that if you didn't have a name for yourself, people wouldn't know who you were. So, I kind of just made this thing up,” Johnson said. “Oh yeah, we're going to be the theater guild.”

MODEST START PICKS UP STEAM

The program began with performances at the school's 300-seat auditorium. After a few years,

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La Habra High School students dance in the Theater Guild's production of “West Side Story.”

DREW A. KELLEY, CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER,
PHOTO ILLUSTRATION, MICHELLE WIEBACH, STAFF

Pageant crowns new Miss La Habra

BY LOUIS CASIANO JR.
STAFF WRITER

The new Miss La Habra, Allison Staumont, topped off her crown Saturday night with the Miss Congeniality title at the La Habra Host Lions Club's 66th annual pageant.

“It was definitely a surprise,” she said of her second honor of the night, which she was especially pleased with because it is voted on by the other girls.

As Miss La Habra 2014, Staumont, a Whittier Christian High student, will represent the La Habra city at several functions throughout the year, including at the Corn Festival as queen.

Four princesses were also crowned and will also



FRANK D'AMATO, CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

Miss La Habra 2014, Allison Staumont, stands with club president Frank Felix and Kelsey Farrell Saturday.

participate in the Corn Festival and other activities. In total, \$3,000 in scholarships was handed out. Staumont received \$1,000 and each of the princesses received \$500 from the Lions Club. The pageant showcased a 1960s theme, with the 11 contestants dressed in era clothing walking out to

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Council closer to Madrona decision

Housing plan supporters offer no rebuttals as hearings end.

BY LOUIS CASIANO JR.
STAFF WRITER

The final public hearings on the Madrona development in Brea concluded last week, and the much-debated upscale housing plan now awaits the City Council's decision.

The plan for 162 estate-sized homes off Carbon Canyon Road has been criticized partly because it is in a fire-prone area.

Opponents made their final statements during a March 18 council meeting. The plan's supporters

made no rebuttals.

Former Mayor Bev Perry, who appealed the Planning Commission's approval of Madrona, gave her final statements. Her team of Madrona opponents told the council that the project would require excessive use of water and that the developer's traffic study is flawed.

Also, Perry said a video simulation of the project shown to the council was unrealistic. Perry said the video didn't show needed guardrails and power lines along Carbon Canyon Road. She said the road to the entrance to the development would be too narrow to accommodate traffic.

“Common sense and the facts tell you that this pro-

ject would add traffic to an already overburdened single-access highway,” Perry said.

She also said fire risks and landslide-prone hills are safety concerns.

Lawyers for the applicant, Old Life Standard, did not make a statement and deferred to the council.

City Planner David Crabtree responded to several issues in the hearings.

“Bottom line is, really, the development application before you will result in significant and unavoidable impacts to traffic,” he told the council. Other issues can be corrected to where “the project impacts are below a level of significance.”

The council will discuss the issue Tuesday.

La Habra High students play members of the working-class Jets gang in the Theater Guild's production of "West Side Story" on March 20 at the Plummer Auditorium in Fullerton.



Zoya Martin, as Maria, and Austin Tebay, as Tony, dance a duet. Originally home-schooled, Tebay transferred to La Habra High to take part in its theater program.

THEATER: In a decade, program goes from beginner to winner

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the productions grew and the group needed a larger venue. Now, some shows are performed at the 1,300-seat Plummer Auditorium in Fullerton.

The guild started with about 45 students performing in four to five shows a year. It has since expanded to more than 200 students in eight productions each year.

Most times, the group works on multiple shows at a time.

The local awards from groups such as the Cappies are endless and include nine best musicals, six best lead actresses and five awards for best stage management. Stage Directions Magazine selected the guild as one of 2013's top high school theater programs in the country.

The program has garnered so much attention that for some students, theater is the reason they attend La Habra High.

Austin Tebay, 15, was home-schooled for most of his academic life before transferring to La Habra, although he lives in Yorba Linda. He's performed in seven plays since coming to the guild, both acting and singing.

"We decided that if thea-

ter was the way that we wanted to go, we were going to go to La Habra," he said.

The requirements aren't demanding: Attend La Habra and audition. That's it.

"I really wanted to have a program filled with well-rounded kids," Johnson said. "I just want kids to do what they feel good about."

A CAST OF ALL STRIPES

One thing Johnson said he didn't want was the typical theater student. He wanted students who were interested in a variety of activities besides the theater.

"There's that kind of idea out there that high school theater is for theater geeks and I didn't want that," Johnson said. "It's been my mission over the last 10 years to get a wide cross section of students here performing on these stages."

And he has, recruiting athletes as well as those involved in student government and other clubs.

Brett Edwards previously played receiver for the Highlanders varsity football team and ran track. Because of health issues, the 17-year-old senior stopped playing and decided to try his luck at acting after hearing about February's planned production of "Macbeth."

Improv performance

The Arch-Villain Show will benefit the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation.

When: 7 p.m. April 4

Where: La Habra High School theater, 801 W. Highlander Ave.

Tickets: \$10 presale, \$12 at the door

Website: thegarbergforce.weebly.com

Source: La Habra High School Theater Guild

Other upcoming shows

"The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity"

Dates: 7 p.m. May 2 and May 8; 5 p.m. May 3 and May 10; 1:30 p.m. May 11.

"Blamed: An Established Fiction"

When: 7 p.m. May 1 and May 9; 1:30 p.m. May 4; 5 p.m. May 3 and May 10

Where: Both shows will take place at La Habra High School's Pitlochry Hall, 801 W. Highlander Ave.

Tickets: lhsguild.com

Source: La Habra High School Theater Guild

His audition was his first time acting. He landed the role of Banquo.

"I was super nervous and had all these thoughts going through my head," he said of his first time in front of an audience.

A world away from the gridiron, Edwards said the pressure of being onstage is as high as any football game.

"You're expected to perform to the best of your ability and you have people that are relying on you to do your job," he said.

Since expanding the roster, the program has delved into other types of shows. There's an improv team, the Well-Behaved Villains, which performs a few times each month. In April, the group will do a show to raise money for the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation.

ALUMS STAY INVOLVED

On a recent Thursday evening at the Plummer Auditorium, a group of 46 students were getting ready to perform "West Side Story."

Dressed in 1950s garb, the actors made last-minute adjustments and loosened up before taking the stage in front of a packed house.

Guild alumnae Annie Lavin, 25, and Brittany Tur-

pen, 23, sometimes return to lend a helping hand.

Lavin teaches English at La Habra and choreographs the group's dance routines.

Turpen is a make-up artist trying to get her business off the ground, but she still makes time on the night of the play to do the cast members' makeup.

Since she graduated in 2008, Turpen said the guild has changed drastically.

"We used to build our own sets and make our own costumes and now they have the ability to rent from New York and all these shows," she said. "What kid this age can say, 'I've worked on a traveling show'?" We didn't have that."

Zoya Martin, 15, who played the lead of Maria in "West Side Story," has been in six productions since joining the guild two years ago. She transferred from Brea Olinda High School for the program.

"We get to do all aspects of theater and perform in this giant, amazing auditorium," Martin said. "I think that alone makes us unique from other theater programs in Orange County."

CONTACT THE WRITER:

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PHOTOS: DREW A. KELLEY, CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER
Austin Tebay sings in the spotlight as protagonist Tony.



Zoya Martin performs as female lead Maria. Martin has been in six productions since joining the Theater Guild.



La Habra High School Theater Guild director Brian Johnson, right, gives a speech to his cast before a show.



The student cast performs breathing exercises backstage before performing at Plummer Auditorium.



Shelby Chavez, left, and Patrick Gray apply their stage makeup ahead of the night's performance.

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