

HALO takes on Santa Claus role

BY SHAWN SHINNEMAN
Staff Reporter

A couple hours before the presents were unwrapped at Sunday's 2nd annual Milan Christmas Party, Dec. 5, Milan resident Lorena Flores had just finished her fourth straight day working from 3 a.m. to 3 p.m.

"They were there waiting for me," Flores said, referring to her four girls of ages 18, 15, 8 and nearly 2. "I told my girls, 'I'm tired, I want to sleep,' and they said, 'Come on, Ma.'"

Just this year, Flores spent four months unemployed after losing her job at the local Premium Standard Farms processing facility. She eventually found a job in Kirksville at the Oscar Mayer plant, but the long hours still make it difficult for a single mother of four.

It is for families like this that Truman's Hispanic American Leadership Organization decided to begin a yearly Christmas party for the Milan community — to make sure every child in the city gets at least some sort of present. They also wanted to give the community a chance to come together and relieve some of the stress from their often tough lives.

"We just wanted to give back to the people," said HALO president senior Danielle Zimmel. "They work very hard during the course of the year and especially during the holiday season. [We wanted] to show them that we appreciate the work that they do and we're here for them, even though we're in Kirksville and they're



Shawn Shinneman/Index

HALO's second annual Christmas party hosted 400 local residents, many more than last year's 50.

here in Milan."

While last year's event drew approximately 50 community members, this year 400 people — 230 kids and 170 adults — signed up. The increase sent HALO members into high gear during the past week as they hustled to account for each attendee.

With the help of the Truman

and Kirksville communities, they gathered enough materials.

"It's been pretty stressful, but it's all worth it seeing those kids happy and excited, and ready to sit on Santa's lap and rip open those presents," Zimmel said.

Kids waited anxiously as the event began with dinner and then moved to a speak-

ing portion. Both Zimmel and Milan resident Axel Fuentes addressed the crowd. Fuentes, Community Organizer for the Center for New Community — a national organization with a focus on improving civil rights — spoke about issues in Milan that citizens needed to address.

Fuentes has been an advocate for local immigrants' rights

since he arrived in Milan in 2007.

One of the concerns he's currently working to address is the language barrier that makes it hard for many Hispanics to get jobs.

"We are going to open a center — the Health Action Center — which is a place where people actually can go and get

education, people can go and gather," Fuentes said.

The idea is that having a center with flexible hours will make it easier to find time to learn English for those working 10 hours a day. It is scheduled to open in early 2011.

As for the Christmas party, Fuentes said it's important to host these events to bring up community morale. Without the event, he said, many of the kids who attended probably wouldn't have received anything for Christmas.

"During these days that I've been helping organize this, I hear a lot about people saying, 'Well, even if it is something small, it's going to make some kids happy,'" Fuentes said. "A kid is going to feel like he is part of the community, and he's getting something this Christmas time."

Fuentes said he has seen improvement in Milan, since arriving in 2007, but there still is a long way to go.

Flores said she has learned a lot about her personal rights through Fuentes, and although it is taxing to keep up with 12-hour shifts and four kids, she does everything she can to spend any free time helping out the community.

She often gives rides to and from Kirksville and does what she can to share her increased knowledge of personal rights, working specifically with women who have been victims of abuse. Her dedication comes at a time when it is greatly needed, and she said it's simply because she wants to "help my people."

Behind the scenes

The unsung heroes of the theatre department tirelessly design sets

BY KATHLEEN BARBOSA
Staff Reporter

As the audience shuffles to their seats and the curtain rises on opening night, the stage crew can breathe a sigh of relief as their countless hours of labor, attention to detail and elaborate designs come together in a completed set.

Throughout the year, the theater department puts on four main-stage shows, two student-directed Black Box Theater shows and student-directed one acts. All of these productions require sets varying from simple walls to elaborate scaffolding. The sets are built within the five to six weeks between each production by 12 to 18 of the members of the stagecraft class, four set shop interns and a group of 10 scholarship workers who work two hours a day, four days a week in the set shop located in Ophelia Parrish. Most set construction consists of building the actual sets out of wood, but they also reupholster donated furniture and paint the set and stage floor.

The crew has various tools at their disposal including grinders, hand drills and a large variety of saws including table saws, circular saws, arm saws and jigsaws.

Senior Matt Dominguez has helped build dozens of sets in the theater department.

"It all starts with whoever is directing the production," Dominguez said. "They might have a concept or they might be going off of

the script."

Dominguez said professor Ron Rybkowski typically is the leader when it comes to set design. Rybkowski teaches the stagecraft class and runs operations in the set shop.

"Once we have a set, we really start breaking it down into the tech aspect," Dominguez said. "How large the walls must be, and we look at what wood stock we have to build the certain specifications of the set."

Dominguez said his favorite part of set building is seeing the finished product.

"I love the idea that we're able to see the finished product and be able to point out the things and say, 'That's something that I worked on, I built that,'" Dominguez said.

Senior Jenny Akers knows how time constraints can mean working right up until the end.

"Sometimes it's a race to the finish," Akers said. "In 'John of England' we were working right up until a couple of hours before we opened."

Senior Angela Bubash has worked in the set shop for four years and has discovered that when the set seems done, other factors can make them realize they need to change the set.

"Once the actors get on the set it totally changes things," Bubash said. "You realize different problems with the set design that you might have to go back and change later."

Sometimes the set designs themselves can be challenging.

Senior Kelsey Weinrich has been involved with the theater

department since the second semester of her sophomore year. She has worked as a choreographer and actress and works in the set shop two days a week. Weinrich remembers one of their most challenging sets she was involved with building was in this year's production of "John of England."

Weinrich said the play required the set crew to build stairs and scaffolding surrounding the stage that were stable enough for people to walk on.

Weinrich said the set is important to the production because it prepares the audience for the rest of the play.

"It's the first thing that the audience sees when they come in and sit down, so it has to inform them of everything else they're going to see for the rest of the night," Weinrich said.

Dominguez agrees that even simple sets are imperative to the play.

"From the most detailed set to the most minimal set, the set brings the audience into our world," Dominguez said.

Creating a set comes with many challenges. Weinrich said limited time, budget constraints and too many people with too few jobs are all major problems the set crew faces every time they build a set. Often when the set is being designed, there are not many jobs for people to do, but when everything is designed, the real work begins.

Set creation is only one of the behind-the-scenes jobs for a play. Truman productions have anywhere from 20 to 60 people work-



Krista Goodman/Index

Senior Matt Dominguez helps run dry tech for the upcoming one-act plays. Dominguez has been involved in dozens of set designs.

ing backstage for each production. Backstage jobs include costume creation and maintenance, lighting crew, props crew, makeup and hair designer, assistant stage manager and stage manager.

Dominguez knows how important backstage roles can be to a production.

"They are the ones that help run the rehearsal process and make sure the show happens every night

once we're out of rehearsal and into production," Dominguez said. "I think they're important jobs that not a lot of people realize are there."

Currently, the behind-the-scenes crew is working on the theater department's next show, the Fall 2010 One Act Festival. The festival begins 8 p.m. tonight at James G. Severns Theater in Ophelia Parrish and runs through Saturday.



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