

RATON ~ NEW MEXICO NEWS



Photo by Tim Keller

Top Left: Bill Fegan, standing at center, in "Androcles and the Lion", the first show he brought to Raton in 1963. Others, from left, are Jerry Murray and Beth & Vernon Oaks, who moved to Raton for 2 years in the 1960s. Top Right: Bill Fegan is still going through treasures that spent 30 years lost in boxes in Santa Fe. Bottom Left: A handbill lost for 30 years shows a young Bill Fegan, circa 1962.



Lost treasures returned to Shuler Theater after 30 years

By **TIM KELLER**
The Chronicle-News

After ten years building and touring his Kaleidoscope Players acting troupe from the Shuler Theater in Raton, Bill Fegan left in the mid-1970s to take over a booking agency back east. He left the company in the hands of fellow troupe members Rene Handren and David Seals, who remained in Raton only one season before deciding to move the operation to Santa Fe. They took four large storage boxes of record-keeping, photos, tour schedules, scripts, and other materials with them to Santa Fe. The company folded in 1976 and the record-keeping stopped. The four boxes disappeared.

When Fegan returned to Raton and the Shuler Theater in 1988, he placed some phone calls to Santa Fe, trying to locate the boxes. He couldn't find anyone who knew anything about the Kaleidoscope Players...or the boxes. He gave up.

Until last week. "The phone rang. It was a young man named Jeff Daly at the Children's Museum in Santa Fe," Fegan recalls. "He was searching for 'anyone associated with the Kaleidoscope Players.'" Daly had found the boxes in storage. He googled "Kaleidoscope Players" and discovered their history at the Shuler Theater from the early 1960s to the mid-1970s. He looked up the Shuler and made a phone call. Bill Fegan picked up.

"I'm the Kaleidoscope

Players!" Fegan said. "Jeff had been in theater," Fegan explains. "He knew the files and pictures would be valuable to someone." Indeed.

Fegan drove to Santa Fe Friday to retrieve the boxes. He couldn't wait to start going through them. He peeked into the first box. "Right on top was a brochure for the first show I ever did, in 1960, 'Two for the Show.'" Stopped at Bobcat Bite for lunch, he marveled as he looked through more of the materials. This week he is still sorting and organizing thousands of photographs and other treasures on the floor of his office beside the Shuler Theater.

"We were designated by the legislature and Governor David Cargo 'The Official State Theater of New Mexico,'" Fegan says, reminiscing about the Kaleidoscope Players' heyday. "The Rocky Mountain News named us 'Best Theater in the Rocky Mountain States'. When I went up to receive the award in Denver, it was presented to me by Otto Preminger, the famous film director. The Colorado governor was there, too, Governor Love. He was an elk hunter and knew Raton. He said, 'I don't know how you did this in Raton.'"

As Fegan worked on his master's degree at the University of Alabama in 1960, he and fellow student Joanna Hawkins started going out on quick road trips to do shows. They created the Kaleidoscope Players, added other actors, and soon were playing all over

the country.

"We first came to Raton with 'Androcles and the Lion' in 1963. The Federated Women's Club brought us to play the Shuler. We were paid \$250. There are still people here who remember that show fondly." Hungry for theater, group of Raton businessmen led by Dr. John Smoker enticed the Kaleidoscope Players to return in 1964. The troupe ended that year's tour with four shows at the Shuler.

"The Shuler was hardly used by then and pretty well run down," Fegan recalls. "John Murphy was the mayor and the city offices were still here at the Shuler." The City of Raton invited the Kaleidoscope Players to move to Raton and take over the Shuler Theater. "The city just turned it over to us. They gave us two little offices upstairs next to the city engineer's office." Fegan took the opportunity and ran with it.

"We had as many as eight teams out, usually a pair of actors, each doing up to 14 shows per week, 40 to 50 weeks a year, all across the U.S. They did a lot of shows for schools. We wrote the scripts for these assembly programs, 45 minutes each — Mark Twain, Benjamin Franklin, the Lincoln-Douglas debates, scenes from Broadway shows. They'd do one show for elementary schools, another for the high schools."

Fegan points to an 18-inch tall stack of file folders he's removed from one big box. "Those are all dinner theaters.

We put together shows that we could perform in country clubs, hotels, and restaurants — offbeat places." Each yellowed file folder has the name of a city. In New Mexico, there are Hobbs, Grants, Farmington, Deming, Belen, Silver City, Truth or Consequences, Rociada, Rio Rancho. "We played 25-30 towns in New Mexico," Fegan says. There's Paris, Texas and Pecos, Texas; Mason City, Iowa; Sioux Falls, South Dakota; Casper, Laramie, Cody, and Rock Springs, Wyoming; Bartlesville, Oklahoma. On and on.

With Fegan gone, Seals and Handren stuck with Raton awhile, then moved the Kaleidoscope Players to The Armory for the Arts on Old Pecos Trail in Santa Fe. The following year they folded the whole show. The boxes of records and memorabilia were lost.

A few years ago, a new museum — The Children's Museum — opened on the same premises, next door to The Armory for the Arts. Eventually, one curious employee looked through the boxes, did some research, made some calls.

Today, Bill Fegan is still marveling at what he's found. At 82, his life has filled with rich memories, fueled now by old tour schedules and road maps, scripts and photographs, memories of an historic time, when Bill Fegan and the Shuler Theater were in their prime.

COLFAX COUNTY CALENDAR

May

■ May 22 - 7:30 pm Raton Youth Theater performance of "Arabian Nights" - Shuler Theater

■ May 23 - 7:30 pm Raton Youth Theater performance of "Arabian Nights" - Shuler Theater

■ May 30 - 0: am Sugarite Canyon State Park Fishing Derby, Saturday May 30th through June 7th. Kid's Derby June 6th - Lake Maloya, Sugarite Canyon State Park, East of Raton

■ May 30 - 7:00 am Week long Fishing Derby begins. Sponsored by Raton Kiwanis and NM State Parks (575)445-

5607 - Sugarite Canyon State Park

June

■ June 5 - 9:00 am to 2:30 pm. The Citizens for the Developmentally Disabled will be holding a benefit Rummage & Bake Sale. Friday and Saturday. For more information please call 445-5674 - 230 4th Avenue, Raton

■ June 6 - 7:00 am Lake Maloya/Sugarite Canyon State Park Kids Fishing Derby June 6th Contact Info (575) 445-5607 - Lake Maloya, Sugarite Canyon State Park, East of Raton



Photos by Time Keller

Left: As RHS counselor Kristen Forrester announces the awards, principal Michael Sparaco congratulates graduating seniors Gavin Wilson and Nathan Aguirre on maintaining 4.0 averages for the past three years. Right: Raton Schools Superintendent David Willden expressed his admiration and congratulations to the new NHS inductees Tuesday night.

RHS honors National Honor Society students

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Stolarczyk as vice-president, Donati as treasurer, and Proctor as historian. Dr. Ed

Hockett will continue in his longstanding service as sponsor.

Superintendent David Willden congratulated and

thanked the graduating seniors for their excellence, for their service, and for believing in themselves. He shared a sense of admiration, noting

that he himself had never been invited into the National Honor Society. He then welcomed the new inductees into the NHS, noting that they

make the Raton Schools proud.

As the ceremonies ended, proud families lit the cafeteria with camera flashes, and then

everyone headed over to enjoy refreshments provided by Myra Baird's culinary arts class.