

# 'Spelling Bee' brings music and comedy to Shuler

By **TIM KELLER**  
The Chronicle-News

A spelling bee at the Shuler Theater is such fun that it's being held over and over again, through July 9. The Tony Award-winning Broadway musical comedy "The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee" pits 10 middle school students against each other to determine which will go to the national spelling bee.

The contest is run by a local realtor and school administrator, plus a parolee doing community service as "comfort counselor" to each of the nine students who must, inevitably, be eliminated.

Adding to the fun, the six actors playing spelling bee students are joined on stage by four audience members recruited before the show by director Gail Dixon-Willden. Dropping amateurs into this professional production adds to the improvisation and fun. In fact, the script designates this effective little trick along with suggestions for the inclusion of timely topical material.

Thus, at the outset it is announced that the regular word pronouncer, Superintendent of Schools Rafael Soto, is not present because he has been detained in Arizona.

Soto's substitute is Assistant Principal Douglas Panch, who last performed this duty five years ago but, he declares, "I'm in a much better place now." Panch is played by veteran South Carolina actor J. Michael Craig, whose timing and experience are put to good use here. The audience can't tell, but Willden reveals that Craig is responsible for much of the play's pacing and the selection of the spelling words for many of the contestants. Some of the play's best humor comes from the sample sentences Panch improvises



Jill Trice-Solano and Ian McCabe are the last two standing at the spelling bee.

for the contestants. Panch is assisted by local realtor Rona Lisa Perretti, who was the champion of the 3rd annual spelling bee. Played by Floy Sitts, she is



Photos by Tim Keller

John Martin and Floy Sitts are two of the three adults running the spelling bee.

the sane anchor among a cast of humorous misfits. Locals familiar with financial advisor John Martin get a laugh just looking at him dressed as a fully Sturgis-accessorized Harley biker; fulfilling community service by handing out Dum Dum suckers and gentle condolences as students are eliminated from the competition.

The spellers are portrayed by Kaleidoscope Players repertory actors Ian McCabe, Dreyson Solano, Jill Trice-Solano, Brenda Ferri, Dale Proctor, and Zachariah Salazar - whose actual ages range from 15 to 45; part of the fun is the costuming, make-up, and characterizations making them middle-schoolers.

Key characters hidden in the list of technical crew, and behind the sets onstage, are music director Bill Crary and pianist Carol

Simmons, who provide not only the song accompaniments but also perfectly timed sound effects, accents, and cues.

Twenty songs are well integrated into the story, as are occasional flashbacks

McCabe deserves special mention for his chameleon-like immersion into his roles: seeing his over-the-top teen William Barfee here just two days after his restrained pastor in God's Man in Texas, it simply



Dreyson Solano and Zachariah Salazar get caught in spelling bee confusion.

when company members suddenly change characters.

The song "Pandemonium" unleashes the cast all over the theater like a raucous roomful of 6th graders gone wild on too much candy and freedom. When a contestant prays to Jesus for guidance on winning versus losing, He actually appears on stage, only to inform her, "This isn't the kind of thing I care very much about."

With actors arriving from around the country to join the summer repertory group, the company had only 10 days in which to rehearse the play. Willden had many phone consultations with the distant professionals, helping them shape their characters in advance. Twenty-two-year-old Indiana actor Ian

isn't possible to see the same actor underneath the two characters.

Jill Trice-Solano merits special notice for her wonderful voice and singing, along with the sweet character she portrays: her Olive Ostrovsky provides the production with a welcome layer of pathos. Aside from Olive, only Dale Proctor's Marcy Park comes close to providing an emotional subtext; the other spellers provide primarily humor and fun.

Which is nothing to sneeze at. There are good reasons this 2004 play is regularly performed not only on Broadway but all over America and the world. Local audiences get two more chances to see it at the Shuler - on Saturday, July 3, and Friday, July 9, both at 7:30 p.m.

## Robert Abeyta earns business doctorate degree

Special to The Chronicle-News

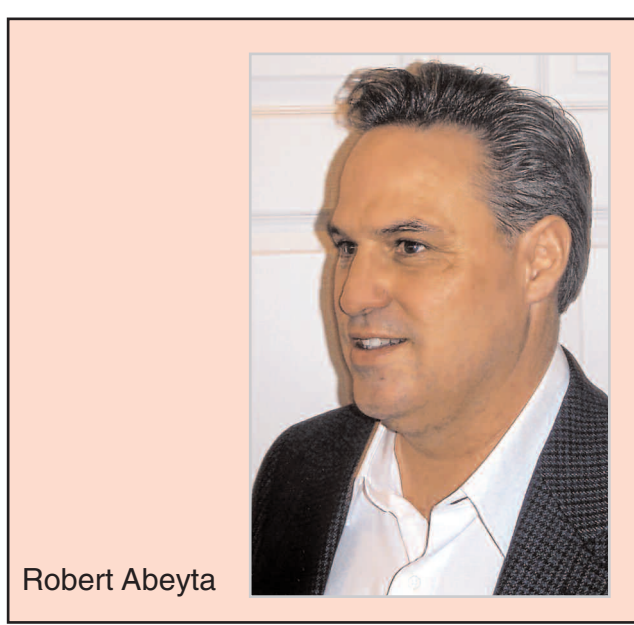
Anthony and Elaine Abeyta are proud to announce the graduation of their son Robert "Budge" Abeyta with the distinguished degree of doctor of business management from the Colorado Technical University Institute for Advanced Studies.

Abeyta defended his dissertation on Nov. 11, 2009, and was awarded his doctorate on Dec. 19, 2009. He holds a master's degree from the University of Denver; a bachelor of science degree from Regis University and two associate degrees from Trinidad State Junior College.

Ron is excited about his new assignment with Boeing International, which takes him to the beautiful coast of South Wales, Australia. Anthony and Elaine have fond memories of visiting him and his family on his last Australian assignment and are looking forward to doing it once again.

Abeyta is grateful and proud to have been raised in Trinidad and praises his parents for instilling the value of education, hard work ethics, and the motivation to persevere in all endeavors.

He has fond memories of all his school friends and instructors while at



Robert Abeyta

Trinidad High School and TSJC. Ron dedicates his doctorate to his children, Jordan, 23, a successful model, promoter and VIP Hostess in Las Vegas, Nev.; Austin, 18, a student at Colorado University's College of Engineering, Boulder; and Kaylee, 13, always his "baby girl," and also, to his former wife, Crystal, an elementary teacher in Colorado Springs.

Having dedicated 24 years in national and military defense systems and homeland securities, Abeyta is proud of his involvement in helping defend America's freedom.

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## THE FINE PRINT

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### THURSDAY Quilt Club

Bound Together Quilt Club meets 9:30 a.m. Thurs @ the Las Animas County Fairgrounds. For info call 719-846-3855 (Sandy).

### Rotary Club

Weekly Luncheon & Meeting 12 p.m. every Thurs. @ the Holiday Inn, 3130 Santa Fe Trail Dr.

### School News

★ HOEHNE - School Board Special Meeting (Purpose: Consultant) 7 p.m. Thurs in the Superintendent's Office @ the school. For more information call Lana @ 680-1362.

### SPPRCD Meeting

Spanish Peaks Purgatoire River Conservation Dist meets 7 p.m. 1st Thurs @ the District Office. Please call Jonna @ 846-3681 x117 for more information.

### Water District

Purgatoire River Conservancy monthly meeting 7:30 p.m. Thurs @ City Hall. Please call Thelma Lujan @ 846-7285 for more information.

### Elks Lodge

Trinidad Order of Elks, Lodge #181 meets 8 p.m. 1st & 3rd Thurs @ 120 South Maple St.

### SUMMER FUN Shuler Theatre

★ 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee - July 3 (7:30 p.m. Sat) & 9 (7:30 p.m. Fri).  
★ God's Man in Texas - 7:30 p.m. July 8 (Thurs), 17 (Sat) & 22 (Thurs) 2:30 p.m. Matinee Sun July 18. Call 575-445-4746 or email <www.shulertheater.com> for ticket information. Be sure to ask about upcoming performances of "Fools," by Neil Simon & "Grace & Glorie," by Tom Ziegler.

### SCRT CALENDAR

★ "NUNSENSE" Opening Night Friday, July 2, 7:30 p.m. - Gala Evening Showing Sat, July 3, 7:30 p.m. For tickets

call 719-846-4765 or go to the SCRT Ticket Office at 132 E. Main. St. Trinidad. For more information email <www.SCRTtheatre.org>.

"NUNSENSE" runs July 2 - Aug 14.  
"BABY" runs July 9 - Aug 13.  
"SQUABBLES" runs July 22 - Aug 12.

### Old Sopris Reunion

Annual celebration "The Sopris Spirit" - Saturday, July 3. Annual Golf Tournament will be Friday, July 2 @ the Trinidad Golf Course. For more information call Sharon Butero @ 719-846-6594 or Loretta Archuleta @ 303-745-8261.

### RATON EVENTS

★ 16th Annual International Santa Fe Trail Balloon Rally July 3-5. Call 575-445-3689 for more information.  
★ Annual Fireworks Extravaganza by the Raton Fire Dept, downtown @ dusk July 4th. Go to www.ratonnm.gov or call 575-445-9551 for more information.

### Carnegie Library

Summer Reading Program runs July 6 - Aug 7. Free fun for all ages: Registration begins July 6. Call 846-6841 for more information or come on down to the Library.

### Art Community

Special showing by Doug Holdread "The Pinon Canyon Experience" July 9-31 @ the Corazon Gallery, 149 E. Main Street, Trinidad. Works in oil & watercolors. Opening Reception 5 p.m. Fri, July 9 - proceeds to benefit the Pinon Canyon Expansion Opposition Coalition.

### Horse Shows

Fisher's Peak Horse Assn hosts annual Summer Horse Show 10 a.m. July 10 & 24 (Sat) @ the Las Animas County Fairgrounds. Each event offers Halter, Performance & Gymkana events. For more information call 719-846-1521.

### Field Trip

Trinidad History Museum - July 10th Field Trip to Camp Amache with Dr. Bonnie Clark & Steve Archer. Cost: \$15 Non-member & \$11 Children age 12 & under, current museum volunteers & History Colorado members with valid membership cards. Registration required by July 1. Call 719-846-7217 or come to the History Museum 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. Mon-Sat.

### Aguilar Fest

Seeking vendors for this fun-filled 3-day Street Festival & Flea Market July 16-18 (Fri-Sun) on Aguilar's Main Street. Contact Megan @ 719-859-1834 or FaceBook - Aguilar Fest.

### PUBLIC SERVICE

#### Noah's Ark

Free Dog & Cat Spay/Neuter Clinic - Fri July 9 & Sat July 10. Appointments are available to low-income residents of Las Animas County (proof of income & animal rabies vaccination required). For more information call 680-2385 during the morning M-F. Sponsored by a grant from Petsmart.

#### Donation Fund

The family of Alfred Freyta has set up a Medical Donation Fund & is asking anyone who would like to help with his medical expenses to please inquire at the International Bank, 320 N. Convent, Trinidad or call 719-846-1600.

#### NM Highlands

★ University in Raton will have GED exams July 12 & 13. Last day to register is July 9. Come by 130 Park Ave to register & pick up a GED schedule.

★ Fall 2010 admissions to MNHU & registration begin now. Semester starts Aug 23. Call 575-445-0445 for more information or stop by. Office hours are 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. M-F.

#### Head Start

Rocky Mountain SER Southern Colorado Head Start is currently accepting applications for the 2010-2011 school year. Please stop by 513 Alta St. or contact 846-4391/ 846-6661 for more information.

#### School Info

★ Trinidad Catholic High - Class of 1965 is planning a reunion for Sept 17th. We are looking for class members: Cynthia Tamez & Carol Jo Zanolli. Anyone who has information about where they might be please call Shirley Compton @ 846-7583.

★ Trinidad High School - Class of 1970 planning 40th Class Reunion in Sept. Looking for class members, Carol Crocker, Donna Garcia, Sylvia Cruz Garcia, Wilbert Garcia, & Kirk Snyder. Please call Pat Mascarnas @ 719-680-8752 or email her @ pmascar3@q.com if you have any information.

#### Al-Anon Family

Group meets @ 6 p.m. every Friday in the Presbyterian Church basement, 801 San Pedro. For info call: Sharonne 719-846-9999. No fee charged to participate & all are welcome.

#### Trinidad AA

Meetings Sun-Thurs. Call 719-671-6066 or 719-546-1173 for details.