Drama Faculty Member Commissioned To Write Play

Work By Edwards Will Be Presented To Area Schoolchildren

BENTONVILLE, Ark. (Oct. 24, 2011) – A NorthWest Arkansas Community College faculty member is crafting a play about a bear that’s lost in the woods to help teach students about Arkansas folklore, nature and wildlife.

The Walton Arts Center commissioned Ashley Edwards, a full-time drama and communications instructor, to write a play specifically geared to kindergarten through second-grade students.

NWACC students will have the opportunity in the spring semester to work with the Walton Arts Center production and to travel to locations throughout the region with the performance troupe.

Edwards participated this past summer in a development process with the Walton Arts Center and Trike Theatre, the project’s partnering theater. Creative brainstorming and research were key components of that process. Edwards presented the project idea and a sample of the play to 50 educators from the Northwest Arkansas region at the Arts With Education Institute. The play will incorporate puppetry, live music and natural sounds to tell a story.

The play will be completed by January and is set to begin touring in February. The work, which Edwards has titled, “A Bear State of Mind,” will be presented to schoolchildren in the region and throughout the state. In addition to being presented to eight schools in Northwest Arkansas, the Walton Arts Center has a goal of touring the play across the whole state in a variety of venues.

Trike Theatre’s artistic director, Kassie Misiewicz, is directing. Jason Suel, Trike Theatre teaching artist, will provide puppetry for the play. Shannon Wurst of Fayetteville, a regionally known artist and recent recipient of an Arkansas Arts Council fellowship in music composition, will compose the music.

The play is aligned with specific educational needs for the kindergarten through second-grade age group and will involve learning activities that teachers can use in the classroom.

The work also is a direct product of the learning standards being taught in the spring drama course Creative Dramatics at NWACC. Last year, Edwards received a mini-education grant from the Arkansas Arts Council to involve Misiewicz from Trike Theatre to assist in teaching and developing
the course. Last spring, the course was altered to include more hands-on learning practice at area K-12 schools and training in incorporating drama into the classroom for varied disciplines. Students used drama to create lessons about math, science, visual arts and English.

Edwards said the Creative Dramatics course offers a great opportunity for students to view and become involved in this latest project. Registration for spring classes at NWACC begins Nov. 7.

Dr. Anita Jones, dean of communication and arts at NWACC, said Edwards’ talent and dedication benefit all students, including the youngsters who will learn about Arkansas through her new play. “Ashley’s energy and enthusiasm provide a catalyst for an exciting production regardless of age,” Jones said. “Pre K through college students benefit from her skill set and creativity.”

NorthWest Arkansas Community College is a comprehensive, public two-year college that serves and strengthens the community through learning for living. NWACC’s service area is defined by the Arkansas Department of Higher Education as Benton and Washington counties in extreme northwest Arkansas. The commitment of NWACC to life-long learning can be seen in the quality of instruction it offers, and the variety of programs it has designed to move students into the job market in a minimum amount of time, enrich people's lives, and prepare them to further their education. For more information, visit www.nwacc.edu.

Cutline:
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