

# NEWS TIMES

## Hillsboro native brings the Bard to town

*Director of Bag and Baggage Productions envisions a permanent home for outdoor Shakespeare*

BY DEBBY DE CARLO

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**The Hillsboro Scott Palmer left 23 years ago to attend college is not the same town he returned to in 2008 after eight years abroad and one teaching at Oregon State University in Corvallis.**

“There’s been huge population growth,” he noted. “It’s become a city — a city with a diverse population.”

Hillsboro, Palmer realized, was more than ready for a professional theater company. And so, Bag and Baggage Productions, once a traveling troupe begun four years ago, found a home thanks to its artistic director — Palmer.

The company has had a run of successful productions at Hillsboro’s Venetian Theatre.

Friday, Bag and Baggage moves outdoors to the Tom Hughes Civic Center Plaza in downtown Hillsboro for Palmer’s adaptation of Shakespeare’s “Romeo and Juliet.”

### Piece of the Pearl

Ironically, he credits the recession for the theater company’s success. “People don’t want to drive to Ashland or Portland,” he said. “People see us and say, ‘Wow, it’s a little piece of the Pearl.’”

The more compelling reason, however, is Palmer himself. He’s managed to attract accomplished professionals to Bag and Baggage. And just as important, he’s getting corporate and civic donations, including a sponsorship from U.S. Bank.

The Hillsboro High School grad has a history of realizing grand visions. After getting an undergraduate degree in philosophy at the University of Oregon and a master’s in speech communication/political science at Oregon State, he enrolled at the University of Glasgow to study theater.

After finishing course work toward a Ph.D., he surrendered to his passion for the stage and became the founding artistic director of Glasgow Repertory Company. He moved on to more theater in New Zealand, and finally back to Oregon in 2007, when he took a job teaching at OSU. There he started the school’s now very popular Bard in the Quad outdoor Shakespeare theatre.

His latest vision is to have a permanent outdoor venue in Hillsboro for Shakespeare and other classical productions. Not that he isn’t thrilled to be performing at the plaza, but it has its challenges.

### ‘Five times’ enjoyable

“There’s no lighting. No dressing rooms,” Palmer said. “The city of Hillsboro has been incredibly



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Tybalt (played by Amanda Wasco) stands over the wounded body of Benvolia (played by Lesli Okorn) during rehearsals for “Romeo and Juliet” at Bag and Baggage Productions’ outdoor theatre venue in Hillsboro.

helpful in helping us with temporary fixes.” Even with lighting and dressing rooms, he said, “it’s five times as hard to perform outside. You’ve got noise from planes, helicopters and traffic. You’re dealing with the elements. But it’s also five times more enjoyable outside,” he added.

Romeo and Juliet is just one of several Shakespeare plays Palmer has adapted. To purists who feel it’s a crime to tinker with the Bard’s work, he pointed out Shakespeare was constantly adapting existing work.

“Romeo and Juliet was an epic poem written by Arthur Burke in 1562. And Burke was adapting the work of French and Italian writers,” Palmer said. “The theme of star-crossed lovers has been around since the third century.”

Palmer, whose day job is communications specialist for the Oregon Nurses Association, leaves no doubt he loves Shakespeare. “I keep his and other Elizabethan plays by my bed. I’m re-reading Coriolanus now,” he said.

He hopes to have two outdoor productions next year, including a coupling of Taming of the Shrew and John Fletcher’s The Woman’s Prize, written expressly as a sequel to Shakespeare’s Shrew.

Hillsboro owes its good fortune of having a first-rate professional theater group to Palmer’s mother. “After eight years abroad, I really missed my family,” he said. “My mother makes really good spaghetti.”

Some things about Hillsboro haven’t changed.

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