

Caroline Bradley

Act Locally-Waco Civic Theater

Eric Shephard has worked as the executive director at the Waco Civic Theater for over seven years. While his day-to-day job includes writing contracts and calling potential donors to sponsor shows at the theater, he directs for a much simpler reason.

“Because I love it. Honestly, it’s almost like not working. That’s how fun it is,” Shephard said. “It’s a chance to be creative myself, the chance to work with other creative people.”

Under his direction, these creative people work hard to perform several shows every year, including four children shows a year. These children shows include works either adapted from adult plays, like “Thoroughly Modern Millie”, or are taken straight from children’s books, like “Freckleface Strawberry.” The adult shows include a mixture of classic musicals and new musicals.

“So this year we started off the season with ‘Matilda,’ which is fairly new, and we are closing out with the ‘Music Man,’ which is fairly old,” Shephard said.

Though Shephard looks to the national stage to pick what shows to put on, he also looks to his local audience as well for signs as to what they want to see.

“We did ‘Always Patsy Cline’ in tandem with Hank Williams ‘Lost Highway’ and that happened because we had a really good response to a country music show a couple of years ago,” Shephard said.

Shephard said they are also always trying to be more representative of their Waco community as well.

“You’re always trying to match the talent base and what will sell with what the community is interested in,” he said.

Shephard also talked about the community that is created within the production of shows and how that is a special part of the experience.

“Sometimes a kind of magic happens with a cast and they just bond together,” Shephard said. “And when that happens, when a show is also successful, it’s really great.”

For those wanting to be a part of an experience like this, there are several ways to get information on auditions and upcoming shows. First, they post information on their Facebook page and website. They are also able to sometimes advertise in the newspaper or on the radio.

One easy way to contact them is through the website or through the Facebook page or on the Instagram account.

Shephard then talked about some volunteer opportunities for those who want to be around this environment but not necessarily on stage, saying that it starts at the front door. He said there is always a need for ushers and greeters in the lobby, ticket sales associates and concession stand workers.

“We have positions for people all the time to operate our soundboard or to operate our lightboard, to build sets or to paint sets, to sew costumes ... So if a person has a desire to be involved, we can find something for them to do,” Shephard said.

This opportunity to find something for everyone applies not only to the theater community, but also to the Waco community as well. In his seven years in Waco, Shephard said that the amount of people involved in the “creative community” has increased as well as diversified.

“Now there are lots of independent artists. There’s filmmakers and there are painters and sculptors, entrepreneurs, jewelry makers. There’s a wide variety of artists and people who are creative,” said Shephard.

Shephard also talked about how this creative community has become more aware and connected among themselves and has been open to newcomers as well due to the influx of tourists. Shephard said not only has this community received support from within, but also from those not directly related to the arts, and that there are “business owners, small business owners and entrepreneurs who are contributing more in our Waco Arts scene than has ever happened before.”