

# WEST LIBERTY INDEX

## Coast to coast

# Puppet's Paradise

The Great Plains Puppet Train stops in West Liberty

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Leo's team pulled a lot of strings to make the big event come together. Puppeteers and puppetry lovers from everywhere began pouring into West Liberty to register for this unique opportunity to attend workshops and see performances by renowned puppeteers.

David Quesal loves attending puppetry festivals, and came all the way from Macomb, Illinois to attend.

"It's a great hybrid between

networking, collaborating, and learning and just making friends," Quesal said. "You know, when you're a puppet person, you might be teased and ridiculed by classmates in school and such, but here, there's none of that. Everybody is a mutual artist nutjob of sorts."

A block of rooms was set aside at the Super 8 in Muscatine to house those who traveled from afar, caterers were scheduled, airport drivers gassed up and a sign language interpreter was hired to assist the hearing impaired during

the puppet shows.

Thursday night offered a warm West Liberty welcome to the many out-of-towners who came to enjoy the festival.

Dinner was served in the basement of the United Methodist Church, followed by two traditional puppet shows to kick off the festivities.

The show that evening was a Punch and Judy show by Peter Allen. Punch and Judy are hand puppets who have been doing shows for several centuries.

For those who have never had the experience of seeing a Punch and Judy show, Allen explained what to expect.

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After the first two shows on welcoming night, the Activity Center at the Muscatine County Fairgrounds was the place to be, as a party was going on with the amazing musical and puppetry talents of Quintron and Miss Pussycat, described in the ads as "barely controlled electronic chaos."

Drinks were served. Adults danced with puppets in their arms. Balloons were kept aloft by waving hands among disco lights and thunderous basslines. The third and final puppet show involved vampire real estate developers in Miss Pussycat's inimitable fashion.

Miss Pussycat's partner, Quintron, loves attending the Great Plains Regional Festival

with Kat Pleviak, who no longer uses wire hangers on her shadow puppets.

"We found something we like better," Pleviak said, "we use surveyor flags from the hardware store."

Tina Nehrling came all the way from Indiana to experience a puppet festival for the first time and to offer a workshop on pup-



Parade Puppet construction with Karen Konnerth on the right. Photo by Stephanie Vallez

morning in Ron-de-Voo Park and Third Street came alive with old and newly made parade puppets, marionettes and hand puppets of all kinds.

A final dinner for all the festival attendees was held in the Methodist Church on Saturday night, followed by one more trip to the beautiful High School Auditorium to see a show called My Grandfather's Prayers by Red Herring Pup-

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This puppet show would be better described as a documentary, and while humor was certainly used, its use was more to prove a point than to evoke laughter.

This was not a story to entertain children, and seeing the show was an experience much like seeing an Oscar-winning drama.

"It's a hard sell," Sturz said, "because it's serious material, and anytime anyone sees the word 'puppet' I've lost them."

The final puppet show was on Sunday morning, and audiences of all ages were dazzled by the magical pockets of Kurt Hunter Marionettes and his tale of a penguin scientist trying to find her way back home.

Hunter's giant overcoat slowly deflated as he unpacked an entire puppet show from his oversized pockets.

Monica Leo practically glowed with joy as she addressed her fellow puppeteers at one of the last performances.

Leo was completely in her element as those who shared her passion surrounded her, making all the hard work of planning and organizing worthwhile.

"It's been a great four days, hasn't it?" Leo asked, her smile wide and genuine, and the audience whooped and applauded in agreement.

Come back soon, puppeteers!

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A marionette roller derby star skates across the bar at Puebla Restaurant during Friday night's puppet slam. Photo by Stephanie Vallez

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# THANK YOU, WEST LIBERTY!



The Great Plains Puppet Train has left town, leaving

the puppet show was an obvious success and featured ten acts at about five minutes each.

These acts included storytelling, shadow puppetry, stand-up comedy, musical pantomime and even a marionette roller skater on the bar.

On Saturday, the puppeteers hit the streets for the West Liberty Children's Festival and Fiesta Latina, where people brought their puppets out to play.

Shows were happening all