

# BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH THE MAGIC OF THEATER

## at Grays Harbor College

BY JULIANA WALLACE



Photo By Juliana Wallace

**“Theater has the power to teach, to heal, to connect us to ourselves and our community,” explains Dr. Andrew Gaines, Ph.D. “It’s both my joy and my passion.”**

That passion has taken Gaines to stages and lecture halls around the world as an actor, director, educator and healer. In the fall of 2018, it brought him to **Grays Harbor College** to head up the Department of Theater Arts and Communication.

With a rich background in community engagement, Gaines has thought a great deal about the significant role theater plays in Grays Harbor. “To me, one of the things that is so amazing about theater is to watch people work together to summon their creative powers and build a reality,” he says. “It’s magic! And we could all use a little more magic in our lives.”


The community participated in that magic this spring when Gaines directed the **Grays Harbor College** production of *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*. Blending Steven Sondheim’s music with a hilarious, gender-bending cast of sparkling local talent, the production hit its mark, delighting audiences.

Gaines has been thrilled to see the enthusiasm Grays Harbor holds for theater and speculates that part of that

enthusiasm arises from the power of theater to change lives. Through the medium of stories, both the performers and the audience exercise their imaginations to safely explore the range of human experience. “They create something bigger than themselves,” he explains. “That can be inspiring and rejuvenating, even cathartic.”

The community will again have the opportunity to join in the fun with the **Grays Harbor College** 2019-2020 theater offerings. The season will include a fall production of the comedy *You Can’t Take It with You*, followed by the musical *Oliver* in the winter. Auditions for both plays will be open to the public, with auditions for *You Can’t Take It with You* scheduled for September 25 and 26, 2019.

In the long term, Gaines hopes to help develop more community outreach, to demonstrate how theater can offer unique benefits to participants in a way that other services cannot. He envisions a service-oriented course in which students learn to use theater to work with under-served populations, such as building inter-generational connections in senior centers or working with disadvantaged youth.

One thing is certain. Whether in the classroom or on the stage, Dr. Gaines will continue to inspire actors, change lives and help all of us summon the magic that we need to find hope in a world that seems to find hope in short supply. 

▲ Dr. Gaines guides student directors on the set of the Grays Harbor College One Act Plays in May. From performing and directing theater, to theater education and community outreach, Dr. Andrew Gaines brings a rich and varied background to his work with Grays Harbor College.

► *Pseudolus* (Analei Holt) arranges a brilliantly cast group of courtesans in the Grays Harbor College production of *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*.

Photo By Keith Krueger

