



Local Students Learn the Art of Puppeteering

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*Reprinted from The Stamford Advocate
August 3, 2007*

STAMFORD - As a young child, Kate Katz enjoyed television shows such as "Sesame Street" and "The Muppet Show" that featured puppets. By the time she turned 10, her father became concerned that she was still watching programs primarily intended for small children.

"My reasons for watching the shows changed. As I got older, I thought about the people performing behind each character. I looked at it from more of a technical aspect," Katz said.

She has turned that early love of puppets into a career.

In May, Katz, 30, graduated from the University of Connecticut's Puppet Arts Training program - the only puppetry degree program of its kind nationwide - and she now works as a puppeteer in television and theater.

Katz, a lifelong Stamford resident, received her bachelor's degree in theater from Southern Connecticut State University and went on to work as an apprentice at the Goodspeed Opera House for three years.

"I didn't want to be behind a desk. I wanted to do something where I was getting paid to play," Katz said.

To earn her master's degree in fine arts degree, Katz spent a year and a half adapting a play based on Sinclair Lewis' novel "It Can't Happen Here." She also directed the show and designed the puppets.

"There is something that's very beautiful and freeing about being able to channel all of a character's emotions into the tool of the puppet," Katz said.

This summer, Katz also has been teaching a four-week elective shadow puppetry class at the University Pals program at the UConn Stamford campus.

University Pals simulates college life for college-bound middle school students.

Students take classes in various required subjects, such as math and science, and choose from elective classes, most of which are taught by UConn professors.

"They have a lot of ideas. They have so much energy and when they start using it creatively, it's amazing," Katz said about the students in her class - Danny Aguilar, 12, Berthania Boursiquot, 12, Ivet Lopez, 14, Courage McKenzie, 14, Carlos Pacheco, 12, and Joseph Rodriquez, 13.

A videotape of the five-minute puppet show that the students designed, wrote and performed will be played at today's University Pals commencement ceremony, which begins at 1 p.m. at the Rich Concourse at the Stamford campus.

The students only had a week to learn how to hold and move puppets, an art that usually takes months.

"I'm proud of the work they've done," Katz said. "Putting on a production allows them to tap into so many levels of creativity."

Katz's work also is being featured at the UConn-Stamford Art Gallery along with the work of Bart Roccoberton, a professional puppet artist and the director of the Puppet Arts Training Program.

An opening reception for the exhibit of 53 puppet displays will be held from 5 to 7 p.m. today at the art gallery. The exhibit runs through Sept. 28.

- The University of Connecticut Stamford Art Gallery is open Monday through Saturday at 1 University Place. Admission is free. Free parking is available at UConn's garage on Washington Boulevard.