



Shop Floor Theatre Company, Getting Schooled

Excitement builds on the Shop Floor as *Schooled*, the Shop Floor Theatre Company's first collaboration with The Groovy Projects' Nate Lombardi and musician/producer Adam Web approaches launch.

Kendrick Jones, founding member and Executive Director of Shop Floor Theatre Company, has allowed SFTC's mission to shape the program. SFTC grew organically out of the Community's response to original and transformative theater: written, produced and presented by students and staged in Flint spaces which form an integral part of the performance. Students work with professionals to learn video production from the inside out. The students are given the opportunity to interview people who live and work in Flint, then write, film and produce documentaries through the lens of their own stories. The Talk-Back sessions following the screenings permit the audience to become a part of the work.

Jones explains: "Members of the Community began to see SFTC as more than a theater company. SFTC grew as a tool for residents, the University, business owners, workers, students and the elderly to share and understand one another's perspectives on life within the Community. SFTC expanded its programming to the Beecher Schools, taking the professional experience of video production into the school setting." Jones is passionate about the critical need for the creative arts in education: to prepare young people to face change, creatively apply their skills, test strategies, and build future success out of failure.

Beecher Schools Superintendent Dr. Joshua Talison termed the partnership with SFTC, "A match made in Educational Heaven. The students are given a situation, and figure out solutions. Skits are developed out of the solution the students find the most effective. Beyond teaching theater arts, SFTC immerse the students in a learning experience to build awareness within each child." As SFTC grew, Jones reached out to professionals in other cities, to connect with a larger universe of creative artists successful in education projects. This strategy works in two directions, as Jones explains, "SFTC builds a pipeline to bring fresh perspective and talent from other areas of the Country to bear on the problems here in Flint; at the same time, SFTC builds bridges for our students and artists to a broad range of careers." Communication is the key to strong families, communities, businesses and nations. Jones understands the arts cannot exist in a vacuum. Jones says, "To the extent artists become a tool for individuals and businesses to meet the challenge of constant change, the arts will thrive. Art can no longer exist for its own sake. The most successful members of our society have found the means to manage chaos. Educators are fooling themselves if they believe science, technology, engineering and

mathematics can be spoon fed to students. The creative arts are at the core of learning STEM." Jones placed his keen understanding of this relationship at the core of SFTC.

Enter Nate Lombardi of New York with *The Groovy Projects*. Nate's interactive school presentations empower the students to be creative and collaborative through poetry and movement. *The Groovy Projects* successfully took on school bullying. As the children participate with Nate in the storyline, they experience situations in a non-threatening atmosphere, in which they can actually try out behaviors and see the results. The students are put in touch with their own power, allowing them to feel how rewarding it can be to lift one another up. Nate brings his associates in theatre, music and production into the mix. This summer Adam Web will join the team for *Schooled: The Groovy Projects*. At the start of the next period of the blended school year at Beecher Schools Dailey and Tucker Elementary third and fifth graders will participate in assemblies with the SFTC. Students at Beecher 9th Grade Academy will become the writers, producers, directors, performers and production crew of a feature film

project. The SFTC has been busy with fund-raising for *Schooled*, while planning and creating the presentations and experiences for the start in late August. Stay tuned...



Nate Lombardi

What is coming up?

- *Illuminate August Edition: Aug 11th*
- *Schooled: Groovy Projects Aug 25-29*
- *Checkout our Facebook for more pics, activities and updates!*

Illuminate Archives:

April

May

June



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The People on the Shop Floor

Rebecca Smith



“This is my second summer with Shop Floor Theatre Company; I am the person “behind-the-scenes” operating the office and supporting SFTC’s work out in the field. I began my journey with SFTC as an intern while still in high school, which allowed me to hone my skills within the fast-paced real-world of the entertainment business. If you had told me I would hit the ground running with top professionals in the entertainment and education fields, I would have been terrified.”

“I am most inspired by the knowledge that every project and task, large and small, helps SFTC meet its goals. My daily work allows me to connect with the community that shaped me. As I conduct interviews and story circles, run on-line auctions, communicate with the directors and present our projects to organizations and school administrators, I experience a wide variety of people with so many stories to tell. We bring them onto the Shop Floor where they can engage students and the business community to solve the issues critical to the unique quality of life that is Flint. Nothing could be more challenging. On the Shop Floor, we create an environment which draws the resources from the community, and permits the stakeholders to contribute and experience the tangible results of their efforts. As a part of SFTC, I make a real difference now, and for the future.”

Kendrick Jones



The growth and success of the Shop Floor Theatre Company reveals the character and qualities of Executive Director Kendrick Jones. He has created more than just an outlet for his love of theater arts. Jones’ experience as a businessman and educator has shaped SFTC into a stable, flexible platform from which to launch a diverse team of artists into innovative and productive programs. SFTC takes advantage of this resource of young, capable performers, writers and teachers in a framework which directs and guides them as a team to stay on target. Jones’ mission is to enable members of the Flint community to come to terms with its problems, explore and discover its resources, and craft solutions. Jones understands the key to success for any enterprise is to keep its finger on the pulse of its consumer. “The response of the community to SFTC’s early projects was a wake-up call. A community outreach organization must stay grounded in the community it serves. Everything about the stories and experiences we share with those who work, live, learn

and grow here—in this place and at this time—that must remain our focus. We cannot create a one-size-fits-all program to solve what we imagine to be the problems and challenges of life here in Flint. SFTC is simply a continuation of my life’s work. Working within the community to build relationships and partnerships for the betterment of all is what I strive to do.

Is it easy? No. Is it profitable in terms of income? No. Is it necessary? Yes, absolutely. I love the work that I do because it transforms lives. It is vital that we expand the horizon for our young people and connect them with successful people across the nation. Through SFTC, they experience the lives of members of all parts of the community, to learn and serve. I am determined to bring it here and keep it real.”

Nic Custer



“I was lucky to be with SFTC from its very beginnings. I have seen the Company evolve in response to the community’s needs and grow into Kendrick Jones’ vision.” Custer co-wrote two plays produced in SFTC’s last two years; now an Apprentice Artist, Custer works with students in Beecher Ninth Grade Academy and

Middle/ High Schools, engaging the young people to create, produce and perform poetry, plays and dance, instilling in them the artistic tools to tell their own stories and creatively deal with the issues they face beyond the short time they spend on the Shop Floor.

Once again, Director Kendrick Jones’ Apprentice Artist Program captured the interest of a capable young artist who brings his knowledge and connections with the state and local arts community, a wealth of setting-specific and verbatim playwriting and performance experience indispensable to SFTC’s working model.

Custer is inspired by SFTC’s success in voicing the needs and desires of the Flint community and building that knowledge into needs-based projects.

“Our interviews with a wide range of members of the community-residents, workers, students, retirees and business owners-bring reality to our plays and artistry; it keeps SFTC grounded in the community it serves. My favorite part of the work is teaching young people the artistic tools which empower them to go out and tell their own stories.”

Emma Davis



“I immediately felt Shop Floor Theatre Company and myself are on the same wavelength. As Founder and Director of the Flint Dance Collaborative, an ensemble of performers working to redefine traditional ways of thinking about dance, I strive to increase access to dance education through site-specific dance, and interdisciplinary work in non-traditional performance spaces, including the Applewood estate, a former GM factory site, and artists’ gallery.” Emma Davis joined SFTC as one of the first artists in the Apprentice Artists Program in 2013. The brilliance of SFTC’S Apprentice Artists Program is apparent in Executive Director Kendrick Jones’ success in attracting accomplished young artists

whose talents and passion for community-based arts education are in sync with his vision for SFTC. A local native and graduate of UM Flint, dancer, teacher, choreographer and performer, Davis embodies SFTC’s core values: give voice and opportunity to the community through the performing arts. After 20 years’ work in traditional styles of dance, Davis finds inspiration as part of SFTC. “I am constantly amazed as I experience the impact performing arts have on our students’ lives. SFTC is often their very first opportunity to embrace the arts in any form, and to connect with the larger community of national and international artists. Every project with SFTC expands my reach into the community.” Davis ended this past school year with the Beecher students dancing, acting, and performing poetry in a community-wide performance for their friends and families. “As I shared the students’ sense of accomplishment and discovery, I realized each of them brought me a unique opportunity to learn, grow, and become a better teacher and artist.”

Natasha LaGrone



It is no surprise the trajectory of LaGrone’s career has followed its orbit back to Flint, Michigan and the Shop Floor Theatre Company. With professional experiences including a Presidential appointment at the U.S. Department of Commerce, internships at the White House, on Capitol Hill and at Black Entertainment Television (BET) Networks, LaGrone found in SFTC the perfect match for her work ethic and personal passion for community engagement. LaGrone credits her parents and her upbringing in Flint with preparing her for the work she’s doing today.

From entertainment to politics to education, LaGrone strikes a balance between professional development and community outreach. Personal growth, continuing education, and re-growth of the community, it’s all about focusing on making progress.

“I am inspired by SFTC’s mission to connect our community to live theatre. We are using theater to develop young leaders by equipping students with transferable skills such as public speaking, problem solving, creative and critical thinking.”

As part of SFTC’s program to expose students to art techniques that promote life skills, LaGrone works as a facilitator of SFTC’s theatre workshops to introduce students to the performing arts. For many, this is their first experience creating skits, performing and analyzing the results. LaGrone captures the students’ attention and focuses them on the work, creating a supportive and relaxed atmosphere in which their unprompted, unthinking responses can surface uninhibited, as their understanding of life situations. LaGrone also writes scripts and develops future SFTC programs.

“SFTC brings performing arts back into the local schools where the arts programs have been decimated by budget cuts. By exposing students to acting, dance and poetry, SFTC is able to help cultivate the next generation of leaders and artists.”

“As an artist I have always wanted my work to entertain and educate. SFTC provides me with the opportunity to align my passion for theatre, my plans for my future, and my desire to help rebuild this community.”

Many Thanks to:

