

Nominee Bio

Joe caught the acting bug at an early age. On holidays and at family gatherings, Joe was always organizing the children in a talent show or performance for the rest of the family. In junior and senior high, Joe put those skills on stage for the first time in *The Fantasticks*, *Don't Drink the Water* as well as in musicals like *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* and *The Wiz*. He earned his B.A. in theater arts at Taylor University and studied at Chicago's Second City Conservatory.

After a long stay in Chicago, Joe and his family moved to Flagstaff, where he was determined to begin acting again. Here he found Theatrikos Theatre Company and was involved in the community productions of *A Christmas Carol*, *Our Town*, and *Little Shop of Horrors* as well as his Viola Award winning performance as Michael in *God of Carnage*.

Joe is currently balancing three jobs: as adjunct instructor at Coconino Community College, as a relief Chaplain at Flagstaff Medical Center and as the Education Director for Theatrikos where he oversees all aspects of youth programming, including TheatriKIDS. Since 2010, Joe has directed or produced over 25 shows for TheatriKIDS. Last year he was honored to be nominated as Arts Educator of the Year for the 2015 Viola Awards in Flagstaff.

Why does the nominee merit the award?

Joe brings a wealth of expertise in theater arts and weaves it into the fabric of the Theatrikids youth program. He encourages our local youth to embark on a theatrical journey; working in set design, set construction, character development, technical lighting, sound and costuming. Joe goes beyond just having his youth "play the part", he reaches into the underlying story and invites his kids to expand their knowledge and social awareness.

Such was the high quality learning experience for participants and patrons alike, in the 2014 production of *Diary of Anne Frank*. He brought the NAU Martin-Springer Institute to explore ways the production could be used as a teaching tool.

Joe provides a supportive environment for youth in his programs, while maintaining artistic excellence. His production of *Les Miserables- School Edition* in summer was main-stage quality and reflected the artistic excellence Theatrikids is known for. The cast was comprised of 39 youth; a monumental logistics challenge to begin with. But Joe pulled off this production with only one week of stage rehearsal, including set build, as his play immediately followed a main-stage production.

Joe has the uncanny ability to take classic works, and apply them to address contemporary social issues. He uses the social justice aspect of the underlying story to strengthen basic moral values, without being political.

Describe how the nominee's actions have contributed to arts education:

Joe is not afraid to break new ground. He challenges his students with not only performing the classics, but understanding its impact. He has the ability to take classic stories, put them in modern settings that address contemporary social issues. Shakespeare's *The Tempest* performed in spring had 98% attendance. The program was so memorable, that the troupe was invited to perform at the Arboretum over the weekend of September 10 & 11 as part of a Shakespeare in the Pines Festival, alongside a professional thespian group.

Joe has a unique ability to cast an educational angle to all of his work. His summer camps allow youth to explore their creativity in a familiar setting, such as *Wizard of Oz*, *Frozen* and *Dr. Seuss*.

He not only explores characters, he ventures into the complete world of theater, inviting his youth to delve into lighting, set production and sound techniques. His "yes, you can!" attitude allows youth to gain new skills, possibly opening up new careers for their future. He creates a positive, supportive environment which allows young minds to grow in ways they never imagined.

Joe is not afraid to break from the usual "norm". While he does offer popular, classic youth productions, such as *Wizard of Oz* and *Alice in Wonderland*, he also challenges his kids to reach a bit further into themselves, and find an ability they didn't know existed. This is truly creating the magic of theater.

Describe the impact this nominee's has had on the lives of others through arts education.

The October 2015 performance of *Alice in Wonderland- School Edition* introduced special-needs youth paired with peer mentors. The result was a moving performance demonstrating youth going beyond their known limitations, creating positive impacts that could last a lifetime. The message was clear: "Yes, you can!!"

Joe teamed with a long-standing *Theatrikids* youth, *Areya Kugler*, to help her achieve her dream of producing a play including special needs youth. Thus, *Stage Buddies* was born. Disabled youth, paired with peer mentors performed an astounding rendition of *Alice in Wonderland, Jr.*

The sheer joy emanating from that stage was reflected in every sold-out seat in the audience. Not a dry eye was to be found at the conclusion of this memorable performance. Joe not only aided his student *Areya* in reaching her dream, he boosted the dreams of many other disabled youth in our community. Joe raised the bar of possibility with this production. *Theatrikos* fully intends to build upon this momentum with future programming featuring an annual *Stage Buddies* production.