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Speakers, artists open SIUE to the community

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Regional

Speakers, artists open SIUE to the community

While the main work of colleges and universities involves education and research, there is also the need to connect with their local communities. These endeavors help to open the doors of an academic institution to the outside world. One such effort at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville is the "Arts & Issues" series of guest speakers and performers.

"These type of activities by institutions of higher education are fairly common and of tremendous importance," said Grant Andree, who has been director of these programs in the College of Arts and Sciences at SIUE since 2007.

A lawyer by training, Andree developed an interest in the performing arts when he was in elementary school and took drum lessons, later moving into "garage bands" as a teenager and college student at Eastern Michigan University, where he started a small concert production company.

"Both the community and the university benefit mutually by these activities," he said, referring to "Arts & Issues." "The university builds relationships and the community enjoys the opportunity to see artists and speakers that they might not otherwise experience." He explained that the selection of the performers is a complex process that includes input from people throughout the university. "We get a lot of suggestions by faculty and even students, and we've booked a number of these artists and speakers in our series."

Part of his job is to both attend booking conferences, where the agents of the artists and speakers show up, and to contact them directly. "I believe that many of them enjoy the university setting and the opportunity to meet with students," he added. "Arts & Issues" oftentimes brings in international performers. "We often work with local communities who have ties to international artists because of their ethnic background," he said. "They've been very supportive."

Andree said that he always tries to



Sweet Honey in the Rock

find a balance in terms of the type of artists and speakers so every season has something for everybody. "Diversity is very important for our program," he said. Price and accessibility is also

important. Ticket prices for "Arts & Issues" programs are often much less expensive than tickets to the same performances held at commercial venues.

"We receive funding from the uni-

versity, corporations, foundations and individuals," said Andree. "That is why a ticket for a particular performer at SIUE can be as low as 25 percent of what you would pay elsewhere."

Students' tickets are either highly discounted or free, he

Aldemaro Romero Jr. College Talk

added. Many performers and speakers also offer master classes or take time to meet with students. "This is a great opportunity for our students to get to meet in person these accomplished professionals and to interact with them in a way that allows them to get first-hand professional advice."

The 2014-2015 season will start on Sept. 10 with an experimental theater piece called "Endurance" by the Split Knuckle Theater, and will continue with artists such as the Mexican-American musical group Los Lobos, famous for providing the music for the movie "La Bamba," about the life of its creator Ritchie Valens.

Other performers will include the African-American singing group Sweet Honey in the Rock; Rosalind Wiseman, the author of the best seller "Queen Bees and Wannabes"; and a joint performance by MILLS/works, Compulsion Dance Theater and the Modern American Dance Company.

Andree traces the development of "Arts & Issues" back to the Mississippi River Festival, which brought big name performers to the SIUE campus in the 1960s and 1970s. "This year we will bring a favorite from that era, the guitarist and singer Arlo Guthrie," said Andree.

Two other writers complete this year's program. Robert Glennon, best-selling author of "Unquenchable," and the nationally known Pulitzer Prize-winning humor columnist Dave Barry.

"We're excited about celebrating 30 years of Arts & Issues," said Andree, who is already busy planning the 2015-2016 season.

For more information about Arts and Issues and on how to get tickets visit artsandissues.com

Aldemaro Romero Jr. is the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Southern

Courtesy of Grant Andree