



FAIR HAVEN
LITTLE SILVER
OCEANPORT
RED BANK
RUMSON
SEA BRIGHT
SHREWSBURY
TINTON FALLS

Greater Media Newspapers • A Group of Ten Community Newspapers Serving Monmouth and Middlesex Counties

Two River Theater continues to embrace Latino community

By JEREMY GROSSMAN
Staff Writer

“We can break down those walls and share what the Latino experience is like.” — Jerry Ruiz collaborator

RED BANK — When Latino characters are portrayed in the arts, they are too frequently portrayed as maids, janitors, gardeners or as gang members, according to Two River Theater collaborator Jerry Ruiz.

That is, when a Latino character is even portrayed at all.

“We’re kind of unseen,” Ruiz said. “Our story isn’t really being heard.”

Sharing the untold stories of the Latino community is one of the goals that Ruiz seeks to bring to the Two River Theater. Months after the theater held its fourth annual Crossing Borders Festival in August — featuring original plays by Latino writers — Ruiz has continued to pursue innovative ways to embrace Red Bank and Monmouth County’s Latino population through theater.

“I think what theater does so well, as an art form, is it really builds empathy,” Ruiz said. “You can kind of go and walk a mile in someone’s shoes. You can kind of see what someone goes through.”

Along with playwright Tanya Saracho — a writer for HBO’s critically acclaimed series “Girls” and “Looking” — Ruiz is bringing the unique Nosotros program to the Two River Theater.

On Dec. 13, Ruiz and Saracho held the first phase of Nosotros, where members of Monmouth County’s Latino community were invited to visit the theater and participate in a community gathering and share stories.



As a result of this project, Ruiz and Saracho will create a play inspired by the Latino community.

“It’s a new program that the theater has created to kind of take that relationshipbuilding to the next step, and instead of only inviting the Latino community to the theater to see these readings, we’re actually ... speaking to them about their experiences and learning more about what it’s like to be Latino in Red Bank and in Monmouth County,” Ruiz said.

“And also really serving as ambassadors for the theater at the same time, and letting [the Latino community] know we want them to come to the theater and to be welcomed into it.”

For any member of Monmouth County’s Latino population who did not attend the Dec. 13 event but is interested in participating in Nosotros, Ruiz said there will likely be another round of interviews and meetings in 2015.

“We can break down those walls and share what [the Latino] experience is like, and I think that can be a real perspectiveshifting kind of experience for an audience to shatter any misconceptions or stereotypes that might not even be conscious,” Ruiz said.

Two River Theater also recently presented “Camelot,” which was performed in English but presented with Spanish captions, an initiative that Ruiz said he hopes to see more of in order to attract Latino audiences.

“We don’t just want to hear their stories of what they’ve been through, but we want them to feel that they can come to the theater and participate in the other stuff that’s happening here. ... I think it’s really all about eliminating any perceived barriers that might be there between the theater and the Latino community,” Ruiz said.

On Dec. 21, the theater will hold its first Spanish-language production, “The Very Hungry Caterpillar and Other Eric Carle Favorites,” as part of the theater’s family-oriented “Dia de la Familia” series.

In February, the theater will present an original play titled “Guadalupe and the Guest Room,” which is from playwright Tony Meneses and is about a Spanishspeaking Mexican woman who is forced to bond with her English-speaking son-in-law.

“It’s important and vital that these shows keep being part of the big conversation that’s happening at the theater,” Ruiz said.

For more information about performances and events being held at Two River, visit tworivertheater.org.