Florida’s theatre community – not only with the growth of our larger institutions, but for the growth of the community as a whole.

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Pittsburgh
By Jozef Spychala

SOMETHING WAS AFOOT as I witnessed a performance this past Sunday. Something about dreams.

Recognizing the need for positive creative outlets for youth in Pittsburgh, and the need for positive lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender role models and messages in society, Susan Haugh founded Dreams of Hope [dreamsofohope.org]. Pittsburgh’s only arts-focused LGBT and allies youth organization.

As such, Dreams of Hope strives to provide an interactive environment where LGBT youth create art under the mentorship of professional artists – art that reflects their life experiences – and to educate audiences on issues facing sexual and gender minorities.

Ted Hoover, a DG member as well as a former O’Neill Conference playwright, serves as a mentoring artist for the youth performers, helping them to craft a series of scenes and vignettes around a particular theme. In reflecting upon his association with the participants, Ted states: “They’ve been battered around by the world, but here – here you get to see them bloom!”

Ted revealed the context of one of the vignettes. A while back, two young adolescent lesbians were riding on a city bus, making their way to gay pride festivities. Along the route, a woman with a bible verbally accosted the two young girls, leaving them speechless. The very next year, when the two girls were asked to generate ideas for possible plays, one disclosed the story of what had occurred on the bus, this time stating: “I wish I had said something to her. I wish I had said something back.”

That’s all Ted needed to hear. Realizing that the process of creation is just as important, if not more so, than the product itself, Ted helped the young performers to craft a scene based on their bus ride, this time though with a twist, that of providing an ending based on what they would have done if they could go back in time.

In addition to providing youth with opportunities to tell their stories and to create art out of their struggles and yearnings, Dreams of Hope also, by its very process, creates emotionally corrective experiences for its members as well. For example, Benjamin Altschuler, 16, soon realized how the performances can inspire acceptance where there was once nothing but rejection. “To be a voice that needs to be heard is my oldest dream. Dreams of Hope is exactly that!”

But the dream doesn’t stop there!

As we began to exit the theatre, I noticed an elderly man with tears falling off his cheeks. As I looked into his eyes, he said: “That was my dream. But now these children get to live it for me.”

Yes, indeed! Something was afoot!

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Chicago
By Douglas Post

POLITICAL SOCIAL THEATRE.” These three words are stamped on the front door leading up to the offices of Stage Left Theatre, a company of actors, directors, designers, playwrights and dramaturgs committed to raising debate on political and social issues. This ensemble, which has been a fixture on the Chicago theatre scene for the past 27 years, has been working out of a 49-seat house only a few short blocks away from Wrigley Field. But this June they will move into a newly-renovated theatre complex that they will share with Theater Wit, Shattered Globe Theatre, and BoHo Theatre. This facility will include three black box theatres that can each seat up to 99 patrons. And Stage Left will celebrate the move into their new home with LeapFest, their seventh annual festival devoted to the development of provocative new plays.

“You make your mark with new work,” states Vance Smith, Artistic Director of Stage Left. “And there are at least two reasons to put a play into LeapFest. We might like a script and want to see how our audience will react to it. Or we might like a script and think that it needs further development. This year we processed some 60 or 70 scripts. Some came from agents. Some came from playwrights with whom we have existing relationships. Some came in cold with nothing more than a sample or a summary. We read