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Shakespeare troupe still going strong

By [Rodger L. Hardy](#)

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PROVO — What do Mickey Rooney's Andy Hardy character, those old black and white film favorites "The Little Rascals" and teenager Chelsea Frandsen have in common?

They all put on plays with neighborhood children.

Now 17, Frandsen started the Oak Hills Neighborhood Theater three years ago when she turned her baby-sitting efforts into a creative expression. She brings in kids from the neighborhood — as young as 6 to their mid-teens — to perform 400-year-old William Shakespeare plays.

Typically they perform the plays in back yards for neighborhood residents.

Most of the participants live in the Oak Hills area. Some of the children who have moved return to act in the plays.

The teen got started when she was baby-sitting an elementary school boy over the summer. They began turning stories into plays and writing plays as something to do, said her mother, Dawn Frandsen. Then they began involving other neighborhood children, which gave birth to the neighborhood theater. Eventually, she turned to rewriting Shakespeare for the elementary school age.

Chelsea Frandsen also directs the plays and calls on other children to assist with makeup, sets and costumes.

"There's very little adult involvement," her mother said.

Last year the teen took her pint-sized troupe to the Utah Shakespearean Festival in Cedar City where they performed in the children's theater.

This year she wanted to raise money for charity, so she contacted Wendy Bird, founder of Pearls With a Purpose Foundation.

Bird engages poverty-stricken women in the Philippines to assemble pearl jewelry for My Princess Pearls, which she then imports and sells. For the foundation she collects tuition money, books and supplies to send to schoolchildren in that island nation. Tuition assistance



Chelsea Frandsen, 17, who started the troupe, puts makeup on a young actor.

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is based on greatest need.

"We sent 96 to school this year," she said.

Part of her effort is non-profit and part for profit. The charity benefited when Chelsea Frandsen and about 40 child neighborhood actors put on "Hamlet" recently in the Tahitian Noni amphitheater for the community.



Queen Gertrude (Abigail Estes) leans over the body of Ophelia (Sarah Christensen) in the Oak Hills Neighborhood Theater production.

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"It's a fun hobby," 11-year-old Eric Sheffield said. He played Hamlet.

"We practice a lot," he said.

"I don't know anyone who's 17 who could pull this off," Bird said.

"I'm impressed she loves your children enough to do all this," she told the Tahitian Noni audience.

The neighborhood theater was recently featured in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints New Era magazine June 2006 issue.

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