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9680 Citrus Avenue | Fontana, CA 92335 | Phone: (909) 357-5000 | www.fusd.net

NEWS RELEASE

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CONTACT: Nancy Yeang

(909) 204-6012

Award-Winning Fontana Unified Theatre Program Celebrates 15th Anniversary with ‘Sleepy Hollow’

FONTANA, CA – The Jurupa Hills High School Players of the Palace have come a long way since staging their first performance, “Sleepy Hollow,” in the campus foyer for the school’s inaugural Harvest Festival in 2010. Now the award-winning program will come full circle with a 15th anniversary celebration, debuting a new version of “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” on Friday, Nov. 14 at Jurupa Hills’ state-of-the-art Palace of Fine Art Theatre.

The new version of “Sleepy Hollow” was written by drama teacher and show director James Griffin, a Fontana High Class of 1994 graduate, and will incorporate the elaborate sets, handcrafted costumes, and student-designed effects that Players of the Palace supporters have enjoyed over the years.

“We wanted to do something big for the 15-year anniversary, so we decided to bring back ‘Sleepy Hollow,’ which was our very first production, even before we built our theatre,” Griffin said. “I love Halloween and restaging ‘Sleepy Hollow’ is perfect for the season and celebration. There are so many versions of ‘Sleepy Hollow’ out there, but none of them were quite what I wanted, so I thought why not write my own version.”

That independent spirit encapsulates the dedication of the Players of the Palace to learn all facets of theatre production – from acting to stagecraft and everything else in between – with a Drama Conservancy that uses a whole theatre approach to prepare students for college, career, and beyond, as part of Jurupa Hills’ Arts, Media, and Entertainment International Baccalaureate pathway.

“We are so proud to see so many of our graduates go on to work in the industry, whether at Disney, Universal, onstage, on TV, or in the movies,” Griffin said. “Because you can’t predict how a career in entertainment will play out, our students are encouraged to learn every skill they can. We have so many alumni who are working steadily in the business because they are versatile and can easily step into any role.”

The Players of the Palace have always been a family affair, with Griffin joined by his wife, Jurupa Hills drama teacher/technical director Molly Griffin, also a Fontana High School Class of 1994 alumna. Their daughter, Jurupa Hills Class of 2025 graduate Amy Griffin, practically grew up in the theatre program, acting in her first play at eight years old. Griffin is currently attending Citrus College, and stars as Elizabeth in the school’s current production of “Frankenstein.”

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The theatre family extends to current and former Players of the Palace performers, including Jurupa Hills senior Matthew Lopez, who plays Ichabod Crane in “Sleepy Hollow,” his first starring role since joining the company as a freshman, when he was cast as Oz in the “The Wonderful Wizard of Oz.” Lopez said the feeling of euphoria he felt on stage for the first time is what convinced him he was in the right place.

“I realized right away that I wanted to do this forever. I’m excited to be in ‘Sleepy Hollow’ because we’ve been talking about the anniversary since last year,” Lopez said. “It’s a lot of work to make to a great show. The principle of ‘living truthfully under imaginary circumstances’ is well-applied here. When every actor believes, so does the audience. I’ve grown so much since entering the program.”

Another member of the Jurupa Hills family is Class of 2020 graduate Jason Flores, who serves as choreographer and production assistant. Though his 2020 starring role in “Clue” fell victim to the pandemic, Flores has used his skills to build a fledgling career in films and television as a stagehand. While attending the University of La Verne, Flores was asked by Griffin to return to the school.

“As production assistant I do a little of everything: prepare actors, work social media, find sponsors for our program,” Flores said. “I can’t say enough about James and the program. James is always looking out for the best interests of the entire cast and crew. He wants them to succeed, wants them to know that to make it in theater or anywhere else, it takes extraordinary hard work and dedication.”

Griffin came to Fontana Unified after many years in the entertainment industry, working for Disney and Universal before receiving an opportunity to help launch the Jurupa Hills drama program and assist in designing the theatre. Since then, the program has consistently been appraised as one of the top theatre programs in California, as evidenced by its continued success at the California Educational Theatre Association’s annual theatre festivals.

“The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” will feature seven performances: Friday, Nov. 14 at 7 p.m.; Saturday, Nov. 15 at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m.; Thursday, Nov. 20 at 5 p.m.; Friday Nov. 21 at 7 p.m.; and Saturday, Nov. 22 at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. Jurupa Hills High School is located at 10700 Oleander Ave. in Fontana. Tickets can be purchased [here](#).

PHOTO CAPTIONS:

FUSD_SLEEPYHOLLOW1: Jurupa Hills High School’s Players of the Palace performing “It’s a Wonderful Life” in November 2024, which won the Ensemble Award at the 2024-25 California Educational Theatre Association High School Festival in January. The Players will celebrate their 15-year anniversary with multiple performances of “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” in November.

FUSD_SLEEPYHOLLOW2: Jurupa Hills High School’s Players of the Palace will celebrate their 15-year anniversary with multiple performances of “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” in November, reprising a play they first performed in 2010, before Jurupa Hills’ state-of-the-art Palace of Fine Art Theatre was built. The theatre ensemble is consistently appraised as one of the top theatre programs in California.

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