

PINE RIVER-BACKUS

Father, daughter performing together

By Travis Grimler
Echo Journal

Pine River

Community theater productions have a way of bringing families together, and that is true for the upcoming Pine River-Backus Community Education performance of "The Princess and the Pea."

Among this year's performers are a father/daughter pair made up of PR-B special education teacher Michael Lupella, playing Donald Dunce, and his 12-year-old daughter, Sophie Lupella, in the parts of Princess Zebrina of the Zynet Galaxy and Moppe, a member of Princess Purity's cleanup crew.

This is not the first production for either of them. Michael has long performed in various plays, both with PR-B and elsewhere.

"I was in 'Greater Tuna,' which I think was two or three years ago, pre-COVID," he said. "Then I was in 'Alice in Wonderland.' That was here. And then in Red Wing, before we moved back, I was in 'Cat on a Hot Tin Roof' and 'The Little Prince' and 'Rumors' in the Sheldon Theatre."

Daughter Sophie is just ramping up in her own theatrical experience.

"I've been in the Prairie Fire Children's Theatre 'Alice in Wonderland' and 'Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs,'" Sophie said.

This is their first time on stage together.

"It's really neat," Michael said. "I enjoy it because it's kind of an escape where you can escape from the stresses of life and be a character and enjoy that. I've noticed Sophie has great imagination and can really bring things to life. It's good to see that applied to the stage, so that's something we can share. Life gets so busy so you don't always have time to share things as often."

They share two scenes when Michael is helping Prince Valiant, played by Miles DeSanto, to scour the surrounding kingdoms to meet the various princesses.

Preparing for their parts, they helped one another not only by practicing lines together but to get in the mood for play acting.

"We practiced," Michael said. "Sophie helped me out with my lines. Then we've done a few home videos too. We did a spinoff of the 1966 'Batman' with the old-fashioned characters. We got some action figures and kind of acted those out and did our own episodes. We've done some stop action Lego stuff and just silly, goof around time. But it's good practice for dialogue and storytelling and stuff like that."



Travis Grimler / Echo Journal

Michael Lupella and his daughter, Sophie, are sharing the stage for the first time in the Pine River-Backus Community Education production of "The Princess and the Pea," which will be staged May 13-15 in the school gym.

"THE PRINCESS AND THE PEA,"

BY MICHELE L. VACA

- **When:** 7 p.m. Friday and Saturday, May 13-14, and 2 p.m. Sunday, May 15
- **Where:** Pine River-Backus High School old gym stage
- **Tickets:** Available at the door 45 minutes before showtime for \$8 for adults and \$5 for students and seniors

This play is produced in partnership with On Stage! Productions, Chicago, Illinois, and with funding from the Minnesota Legacy Funds distributed through the Five Wings Arts Council.

Both thespians are enjoying the lighthearted nature of the play.

"I play the simple sidekick to the prince," Michael said. "I get to do a lot of silly one-liners to kind of throw humor into scenes."

Michael enjoys his scene where he's figured out the plan to identify the kingdom's true princess.

"The rest of the play I'm kind of on the foolish side," Michael said. "Then I get to be the one that knows something nobody else does."

Sophie is particularly entertained by the antics of King Maximilian (Isaak Anderson).

"There's one scene partway through Act Two where Donald and Prince Valiant are having this talk about the secret test and Princess Olivia, and the king is in the background sighing all the time. I think his sighs are hilarious," she said.

"I like your alien scene too," Michael told Sophie. "The aliens behind Sophie are kind of reacting to what's going on. She rattles off some fancy terms and I don't know what's going on, but they do. It's that kind of contrast that I think is interesting."

Michael thinks the audience will find themselves entranced by DeSanto's Prince Valiant.

"He's easily likeable," he said. "He's trying to find the

princess and I think people will really latch onto that. I think they'll also like the king and queen mother. They have a kind of dynamic where the king is trying to keep the peace and then the grandmother is very demanding."

Sophie thinks she will try theater again in the future if this production doesn't prove too nerve-wracking. The father/daughter pair is quick to encourage others to try out for local theater in the future.

"We have a big cast, a big script a lot of people can be part of," Michael said. "Some people want to be bashful or whatever. I say to anyone, give it a shot. Come try out. There's room for everybody. Jen (Anderson, director) has said many times we'll cast everyone and bring everyone out here. It's just fun to get a lot of different personalities and people out there and meet new people and try new things and just support the arts."

The Lupellas aren't the only family to appear on stage for this production. Also appearing are Katie Shetka and son Nathan Shetka, as well as Isaak Anderson and daughter Olivia Anderson under the direction of wife and mother Jen Anderson.

Travis Grimler is a staff writer for the Pineandlakes Echo Journal weekly newspaper in Pequot Lakes/Pine River. He may be reached at 218-855-5853 or travis.grimler@pineandlakes.com.

CALENDAR

MAY

► 13-15: Pine River-Backus Community Education spring play: "The Princess and the Pea," 7 p.m. May 13-14, 2 p.m. May 15, high school old gym

► 13: Lakes Area Music Festival: The Glass Salon, 7:30 p.m., Gichi-zibii Center, Brainerd High School

► 14: Nisswa Chamber of Commerce Welcome Wannigan, Gull Lake

► 14: Nisswa Chocolate Walk

► 14: Fishing Opener Block Party, Pequot Lakes

► 14: Timber Bay spaghetti feed and silent auction fundraiser, 4-7 p.m., Pine River American Legion

► 14: Central Lakes Community Performing Arts: Zeppo, the Music of Led Zeppelin, 7 p.m.

► 18: Old Age is Not For Sissies 2.0: Feeling Your Best Self, 1-3 p.m. Pine River United Methodist Church

► 19-20: Greater Lakes Area Performing Arts: auditions for "Newsies," 6 p.m., Pequot Lakes High School auditorium

REMINDER

► Timber Bay will hold its spaghetti feed, ice cream sundae bar and silent auction fundraiser from 4-7 p.m. Saturday, May 14, at the Pine River American Legion. Suggested donations are \$8 for adults, \$5 for kids 12 and under and \$25 for families.

Happy Dancing Turtle celebrates spring with Outdoor fair

PINE RIVER — Family activities and sustainable living will be highlighted at Happy Dancing Turtle's free Spring Fair from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday, May 21.

This free event will feature more than 35 vendors and exhibitors, mini-workshops and family activities - all outdoors at the Lakes Music & Events Park in Pine River.

There will be new educational information at the following mini-workshops:

► 11 a.m.: Rain Garden Design Using Native Plants.

► Noon: Building Soil Health in Your Field or Garden.

► 1 p.m.: Rainfall Simulator Demonstration.

► 2 p.m.: The Importance of Outside Play.

At 10:30 a.m., 11:30 a.m., 12:30 p.m. and 1:30 p.m., participants may join the HDT celebrity readers for a nature-themed book and craft.

Guests include Soulful Horse, WonderTrek

Children's Museum and Happy Dancing Turtle's "turtle" mascot. The Babinski Foundation will have an adoption event from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

There will be food available on-site for purchase.

"We are fortunate to have many favorite Back to Basics vendors and exhibitors joining us plus some exciting new ones. The activity and workshop line up is outstanding," Quinn Swanson, Happy Dancing Turtle's executive director, said in a news release. "We predict being outdoors at the Lakes Music & Events Park will bring even more energy to this event."

For more information, visit happydancingturtle.org/back-to-basics.

Happy Dancing Turtle is a nonprofit dedicated to growing good stewards of the planet by providing education, programs and experiences for youth and adults that inspire wonder and empower change.

BRIEFS

Nisswa Chocolate Walk is May 14

NISSWA — The annual Nisswa Chocolate Walk is Saturday, May 14.

The event will begin at Wildflower Chocolate on Hazelwood Drive where check-in and welcome will take place on the backyard patio. Participants will then be directed to Main Street where they can follow a route map to participating vendors throughout the city.

Those who wish to cycle the walk may park at the Paul Bunyan Trailhead and then ride to Wildflower Chocolate via the underground tunnel. Children may participate in the walk without an additional ticket.

The Chocolate Walk benefits both Nisswa Elementary School's outdoor education and schoolyard gardening efforts and the Cuyuna Chapter Little Bellas, a mountain bike mentorship program for girls and young women.

The chocolate walk is estimated to take approximately 2-3 hours without added shopping. Tickets are \$35. Participants may choose their time slot and register at wildflowerchocolate.com.

For more information, call 218-961-1074 or email kate.stumvoll@gmail.com.

Fundraiser breakfast set May 15 in Hackensack

HACKENSACK — The Hackensack American Legion Auxiliary Unit 202 will serve a fundraiser breakfast from 8:30-11:30 a.m. Sunday, May 15, at the club.

The menu includes a choice of biscuits and gravy with eggs, or French Toast with eggs and bacon. Both include juice and coffee for \$7.

The proceeds go to support youth scholarships.

Pequot Lakes Community Education offers more May classes

PEQUOT LAKES — Pequot Lakes Community Education offers the following upcoming classes. Register online or through the commu-

nity education office by calling 218-568-9200.

► **The Assassination of President JFK: An In-Depth Analysis:** 1-3 p.m. Monday and Tuesday, May 16-17, at the Pequot Lakes Public Library. Fee: \$10.

This two-day presentation will examine discrepancies between the Warren Commission Report and the conclusions the U.S. House of Representatives reached that investigated the assassination for 31 months.

Presenter David Yorks has a master's degree in history and has attended national conferences speaking with witnesses and doctors regarding the assassination of JFK.

► **Heartsaver Adult, Child, Infant CPR and First Aid:** 6-9:30 p.m. Wednesday, May 18, at Pequot Lakes High School. Fee: \$85.

Instructor Toni Lee Johnson will teach critical lifesaving skills to care for someone until emergency help arrives. This class may be well suited to child care providers, security officers, law enforcement, health and fitness instructors, students, parents, grandparents or anyone who wants basic knowledge to help save someone's life.

Vision impaired students are encouraged to attend. All information will also be available in Braille.

► **How to Visually Read Braille:** 6-9 p.m. Wednesday, May 18, at Pequot Lakes High School. Fee: \$30.

Certified Braille transcriber Gail Stefanick will teach students to visually read uncontracted Braille. Students will have a clear understanding of contracted Braille along with its many contraction uses and formats. Print and Braille worksheets will be available.

Information on how to become a Braille transcriber will be available. Class will be available to anyone interested: parents, friends, relatives, family, paraprofessionals, teachers' aides or anyone who works or spends time with the blind or visually impaired.

ing a firm foundation for building a life.

Social hour is at 11:30 a.m. with the luncheon at noon. The charge for lunch is \$25. President Ann Swanson will lead a short meeting after the program, and Joy Musty will offer an inspirational message.

Guests are always welcome. For information on joining the club or attending meetings, email info@nissawomen.org.

Gardening classes, birding classes, nature hikes offered in Pine River

PINE RIVER — Balsam Moon Preserve in

Pine River is hosting nature themed classes and events starting with Gardening 101 from 9 a.m. to noon Friday, May 20.

This class will teach the basics of organic gardening. Participants will learn from instructor Jeff Davidge, a long-time gardener training as a Master Gardener. He will present the basics of soil structure to nurture soil to grow vegetables and flowers as well as how to start seeds and more.

Davidge will also guide early morning bird watching and nature hikes from 7-9 a.m. Sundays, May 22 or June 5.

Register for all classes and activities by calling 218-587-3808 or email BalsamMoon3148@gmail.com.

Balsam Moon operates on reciprocity, meaning no fees are charged for classes and activities. They welcome giving in accordance to what a student receives.

People are also welcome to come and simply walk the trails, grounds, labyrinth or sit by the pond and enjoy nature.

For more information, visit <https://balsammoonpreserve.wixsite.com/balsam> or Facebook, email BalsamMoon3148@gmail.com or call 218-587-3808.