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BERKELEY REP CELEBRATES KATHY KELLNER GRIFFITH'S 20TH ANNIVERSARY

Tailor has crafted costumes at Tony Award-winning theatre for two decades

OCTOBER 9, 2006 – It looked like any other day for San Lorenzo resident **Kathy Kellner Griffith** – she was up to her ears in pins and plaid swatches, joking with the people sewing nearby – but October 2 marked **the tailor's 20th anniversary in the costume shop** at Berkeley Repertory Theatre.

Kathy's career at Berkeley Rep began in 1986, as a stitcher for its production of Charles Dickens' *Hard Times*. She recalls making a velvet coat for Laurence Ballard, a lavender dress for Michelle Morain, and two shirts for Jarion Monroe. "We were so far behind for that show," she laughs, "that [former artistic director] Sharon Ott was sitting next to me **sewing buttons at eight o'clock on opening night**. That would never happen now, because we work smarter. Everything's ready days before opening."

It's **153 shows and thousands of costumes later**, but Kathy's still at it. Today, she serves as Berkeley Rep's master tailor, which means she's responsible for making patterns, supervising construction, and overseeing alterations of men's costumes. That can mean as many as 75 pieces for a single show, seven shows a year, year in and year out. And things just came full circle: for the Theatre's current production of *Mother Courage*, Kathy actually did fittings and alterations again for Jarion Monroe, and this spring she'll work on another Dickens piece, Berkeley Rep's production of *Oliver Twist*.

"Kathy represents the best of Berkeley Rep," says the Theatre's managing director, Susan Medak. "Her attention to detail and her concern about quality are what make our productions so distinctive. I can't even begin to express the depth of our gratitude for her many years of service."

Literally miles of fabric have flown through Kathy's fingers, but there are some costumes that she'll never forget: "There was the gorgeous coat lined with 'wolf fur' for Michael Winters in *The Life of Galileo*; James Carpenter's long, billowy 'man skirt' for the fashion show in *Fêtes de la Nuit*; and the frock coat with the horizontal stripes that Warren Keith wore in *Rhinoceros*. And I loved all of *Zorro in Hell* – because I'd never done that period before. The high-waisted pants, cummerbunds, and bolero jackets look so good, and the Culture Clash guys are so fun to work with.

"I also love fitting Geoff Hoyle," Kathy chuckles, "even though it's impossible to get him to stand still. Once he's in the clothes, he's off doing his shtick from the show and you're **chasing after him with the pins**. It's like a private performance."

Not every fitting is so enjoyable, however. "Once I was trying a coat on J. Michael Flynn for a Marivaux play," she recalls. "I was trying to pull it tight around the shoulders when **my hand slipped and accidentally punched him in the jaw!** Luckily he had a sense of humor."

An ability to laugh seems to be a prerequisite for Kathy's job. People come and go – she points out that past co-workers have gone on to become "everything from fashion designers and

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magazine editors to pastry chefs and sailors on tall ships” – but the costume shop is always filled with laughter. “My favorite thing, and the reason I’ve been here for 20 years, is the people,” she remarks. “We have a lot of fun in the shop. Particularly at the end of a hectic build, we’re just cracking up.”

Along the way, Kathy and her husband Mike had two children. She remembers when the kids were born based on the show Berkeley Rep was presenting at the time: “Emily is 12 – she’s my *Woman Warrior* baby – and Claire is nine. I went to opening night for the Scottish play when I was pregnant, and **Duncan pounded on a door so loudly that Claire jumped in my belly!** The next day, she was born.”

While on the topic of the next generation, Kathy offers two pieces of advice for young people thinking of becoming theatre artisans: “Start planning ahead sooner than I did. **Open your Roth IRA now, and enroll in an exercise class to stay fit.**”

This levelheaded and sensible approach to life is also apparent in Kathy’s favorite choice of fabric. As she effortlessly slides pins into a suit for Berkeley Rep’s next show, *Passing Strange*, she says, “I like to work with nice, solid, 100% wool. Something reliable and sturdy.”

It’s exactly those qualities that have made Kathy a beloved employee and co-worker at Berkeley Rep for two decades.

Backstage tours – including a visit to Kathy’s costume shop – are one of the benefits of being a donor to Berkeley Rep. For more information on the Theatre, charitable gifts and backstage tours, or upcoming shows, click berkeleyrep.org, dial 510.647.2949, or call toll-free at 888.4.BRT.Tix.

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ABOUT BERKELEY REP

Founded in 1968, the Tony Award-winning Berkeley Repertory Theatre has established a national reputation for its ambitious programming and dynamic productions. Under the leadership of Artistic Director Tony Taccone and Managing Director Susan Medak, Berkeley Rep seeks to engage its audience in an ongoing dialogue of ideas. Through its bold choice of material and vivid style of production, Berkeley Rep reflects a commitment to diversity, excitement, and quality. The company is especially well known for its presentations of important new dramatic voices and its fresh adaptations of seldom-seen classics. In 2001, Berkeley Rep opened the Roda Theatre, a 600-seat proscenium theatre that complements the 400-seat Thrust Stage, and the Berkeley Rep School of Theatre, housed in the Nevo Education Center. The addition of these two buildings has transformed what was once a single stage into a vital and versatile performing arts complex.

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