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Studio East founder Lani Brockman to retire after 30+ years of working with young people on stage

KIRKLAND, WA — Lani Brockman, a champion of youth theater for more than three decades, will step down as artistic director of Studio East Training for the Performing Arts and StoryBook Theater later this year.

The non-profit Studio East is one of the largest children's theater training programs in the Northwest. Its adult touring arm, StoryBook Theater, brings original musicals to families and young children throughout the region. Together, they reach up to 70,000 kids each year.

Studio East's Board of Directors will begin a regional and national hiring search for a new artistic director in the coming weeks.

"Lani has had an incredible impact on thousands upon thousands of kids," said Mary Beth Binns, president of the Studio East Board. "Her actors have experienced the joy and rigor of being part of a production. They learned collaboration, accountability, empathy. For some, the time on our stages was a doorway into a creative career—but for all, it was an opportunity to learn human skills that apply to any role in life."

Across the country and back again

Brockman was born in Seattle, raised in Hawaii, and attended the University of Washington before heading to New York to study at Broadway's Circle in the Square Theatre. After a stint with the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus, she was tapped by Disney for a one-woman show in schools throughout the U.S. to promote literacy.

She returned to the Northwest and worked with the now-departed Northwest Actors Studio and then Seattle Children's Theatre.

In 1992, Brockman opened Studio East in Kirkland, which now offers quarterly classes, dozens of summer camps, outreach into schools, and seven Mainstage productions each year. Brockman's worn many hats: director, costume designer, show writer, audition coach.

After several years, she teamed up with creative partner Susan Bardsley to launch StoryBook Theater. StoryBook presents original short musicals with adult actors for children ages three to 10 and their families throughout Puget Sound.

More valuable than ever

Brockman said she's most proud that Studio East has created a culture where young people can explore who they are, and who they want to be. That's more important than ever in light of the pandemic, when many people lost opportunities for in-person connection.

"Kids need a safe place to make mistakes and not be judged. Theater offers that. For teaching human interaction, truth, honesty, communication, listening—there's nothing like theater."

Celebrations to honor Brockman's legacy and look forward to Studio East's next chapter will be announced in coming months.

About Studio East and Storybook Theater

Founded in 1992, Studio East is one of the largest children's theater training programs in the Seattle Metro area. Today, along with its touring arm, StoryBook Theater, Studio East serves more than 70,000 people annually. Studio East has a comprehensive program of drama classes, theater arts summer camps, and mainstage productions for children from ages 4 through 19.

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