

## Regional

# Arts & Issues chief Andree has had adventures

Institutions of higher education have a duty to share the work they do with their communities. They do that by showcasing their own artists and scholars and also by inviting artists and speakers from elsewhere to come to campus and engage community members with their work, their talents and their ideas.

This is the case at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, which annually runs a program called "Arts & Issues" under the direction of Grant Andree.

Born in Lakeland, Fla., Andree's interest in performing arts began when he began drum lessons while in elementary school. As a teenager he played in "garage bands," and as a student at Eastern Michigan University he started a small concert production company.

Andree received a degree in philosophy and went on to Law School in the Detroit College of Law (now at Michigan State). Yet, after a short stint as a lawyer he went back to performing arts. He has been the director of the Arts & Issues program at SIUE since 2007, a job much more complicated than it may seem.

There is one major cause for the complex nature of Andree's job: logistics. Almost without exception all artists and speakers come from outside Edwardsville, many from other countries. Sometimes performers are big bands, sometimes they are individual speakers, but all have their own special needs. And there are always the unexpected problems.

"There is always a problem and you can never anticipate what that's going to be," said Andree. "For instance, with The Count Basie Orchestra the musicians were coming in from different flights all over the country and my transportation company made a mistake and I had musicians waiting at the airport. I had planned on doing other things but I had to jump in my car and go down and pick up a number of musicians. And then their luggage didn't show up, so I had to trade jackets as I was coming off the stage and another musician was going on. So it is

## Aldemaro Romero College Talk

those kinds of little things that are going on throughout the night that keep you on your toes."

Andree still remembers the first concert he put together at SIUE. "A lot of the arrangements were made before I came on, and one of them was to have an RV as dressing room for Judy Collins," Andree said. "Then the soundman shows up and says, 'What's the RV for?' and we had it filled with all the hospitalities, the drinks, the pillows and all the stuff they wanted in their rider. He said, 'We're moving this stuff all inside,' so we gather all this stuff and moved it into the dressing room at the Morris University Center.

Then the air conditioning goes down, so he decided to move it all back out to the RV. Judy Collins shows up and says, 'What's the RV for?' and she has us move it all back into the dressing room! And the soundman during all this time was yelling at everybody. So that was my initiation."

For 2011-2012, Andree has put together a constellation of big names. "For one thing, we are going to do something new that we hope becomes an annual event and that is a homecoming concert," Andree said. "And it is new for me because we are going into the Vadalabene Center."

On that evening, Three Dog Night, the legendary band from the 1960s and 1970s, opens the season on Oct. 8. Neil deGrasse Tyson, the director of the Hayden Planetarium at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, will speak Dec. 7 on "Our Past, Present, and Future in Space."

Tyson has written a number of books and has made frequent television appearances, including "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart," "The Colbert Report," and most notably as host of the PBS program "NOVA." He is probably the most famous contemporary American scientist.



Denise Macdonald/SIUE

Grant Andree, left, fields questions from reporters before last year's appearance by autism advocate Temple Grandin.

The impact of these performances and talks cannot be underestimated.

"A significant amount of our audience does come from the region, from half a dozen or a dozen cities in the area, people who are not affiliated with SIUE. Plus we do some other things, too. When we are able to, we will distribute some free tickets to the Edwardsville High School or the Alton school."

Last year, Arts & Issues sold out the presentations by American documentarian Ken Burns and autism advocate Temple Grandin. Each show sold 800 tickets.

"Grandin was interesting because she didn't have an agent," said Andree. "I had heard her a number of times on National Public Radio and knew she would be fantastic so I just googled her and found her."

Some events involve local participants, such as when Andree brought the Eisenhower Dance Ensemble in to perform with both SIUE students and students from area high schools.

Sometimes artists provide quite unusual performances, oftentimes surprising the audiences.

"For Simon Shaheen, I received a lot of

positive feedback on that because he is the type of artist you don't see every day," said Andree.

"On the other hand, The Langston Hughes Project was very different but I also received a lot of feedback on that where you are combining the music and the poetry."

*Aldemaro Romero is the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. His show, "Segue," can be heard every Sunday morning at 9 a.m. on WSIE, 88.7 FM. He can be reached at [College\\_Arts\\_Sciences@siue.edu](mailto:College_Arts_Sciences@siue.edu).*