

Where there's a Will, there's a play April 29  
by Charlene Baldrige

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Alex Sandie, founder of the San Diego Student Shakespeare Festival, wasn't always a Bard buff. Recently he told Village News all about it.

"My passion for Shakespeare "" his works and his language "" was developed when I was 60-plus," Sandie said.

That was when the late Martin Gerrish, artistic director of Octad-One Theatre, asked Sandie to portray Polonius in "Hamlet."

"The experience, the language, the drama "" you name it "" was so inspiring it made me regret having ""turned away' from Shakespeare at high school in Edinburgh, Scotland," he said.

Sandie was so thrilled, in fact, that he suggested the idea of a Shakespeare Society to director/actor Rosina Reynolds, to actor Jonathan Dunn-Rankin, to Old Globe Associate Artist Jonathan McMurtry and to longtime Globe educator and dramaturge Diane Sinor. All were very supportive.

Founded in July 2000, the Society holds a celebrity reading of Shakespeare sonnets each year as well as presenting various programs of interest.

From 12:30 to 4:30 p.m. on Saturday, April 29 in Balboa Park, Sandie's enthusiasm pays off royally in a free Student Shakespeare Festival. Several years in the planning, it was inspired by a similar event sponsored by the Denver Public Schools, which Sandie saw on "The News Hour with Jim Lehrer." Lehrer's show reported that 3,500 students grades K-12 performed up to 10 minutes of Shakespeare on nine stages set up in downtown Denver.

"Gee, I thought, how inspiring! I wished that I had that opportunity when I was of school age," he said. "Wouldn't it be wonderful for this to happen in San Diego?"

Sandie obtained a copy of the Denver Festival video and got to work promoting the idea.

"While we realize that Shakespeare is in the curriculum of most high schools, the Society's goal is to bring the teaching of Shakespeare and performance to all grade levels," he explained. "We plan to do this by way of no-cost workshops for teachers with local instructors and The Folger Institute. The students are our future, and to broaden their educational experience through the study and performance of the greatest writer of all time will be their joy and our reward. Our deepest thanks to all who have volunteered their expertise, time, support and funding, to make this possible in San Diego."

Sandie's dream, the first annual Student Shakespeare Festival, presents singing, dancing, juggling, puppetry, fencing and emoting on two stages set up along the Prado. Students from 22 schools and arts organizations present portions of Shakespeare's works, just as in Balboa Park's days of yore when truncated versions of the plays were presented during the 1935 Exposition.

The Festival is designed to make Shakespeare come alive for young people and for all people. Festivities begin at 12:30 p.m. with opening ceremonies and a procession from the Organ Pavilion to the Prado. Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth I (Tara Pool) and Mary, Queen of Scots (Susan Abernethy) will be there. Sandie hopes you will be, too.

Funding is provided from Supervisor Pam Slater-Price, County of San Diego; the Pratt Fund; Community Service Association; and the members of the San Diego Shakespeare Society. The Festival also has the support of the County Office of Education and the San Diego City Schools. Among the participants are students from Our Lady of Peace, Torrey Pines High School and La Jolla Country Day. For more information, visit [www.sandiegoshakespearesociety.org](http://www.sandiegoshakespearesociety.org).