

ARTS & CULTURE

Lakes Area Arts

Post Prom Parents PJ Party

NEW LONDON – Who wants to hang out, watch movies, dance, and wait up until we’ve got to go and pick up our kids? Come to the Little Theatre on May 4 from 10:30 p.m. until May 5 at 4 a.m. Please visit New London Roaming Cinema’s events page for more details.

Songs of Broadway

SPICER – The Prairie Arts Chorale Spring Concert will be changing the world one song at a time, celebrating the songs of broadway, on Sunday, May 5 at Faith Lutheran Church at 4 p.m. Visit www.PrairieArtsChorale.com for more information.

Spring Concerts

NEW LONDON – Come to the Performing Arts Center to enjoy the music of the NL-S Middle School band on Thursday, May 15 at 7 p.m. And the High School Band on Friday, May 16 at 7 p.m. followed by the High School Choir. The Middle School Choir concert will be Monday, May 20 at 7 p.m.

Actors Needed!

NEW LONDON – Auditions for Watson the Last Great Tale of the Legendary Sherlock Holmes will be May 13-14 at 7 p.m. at the New London Senior Citizen Center , 2nd Ave SW & Norwood St SW , New London. Want to join the fun? Call: 320-354-2559 or email: nllittletheatre@gmail.com

Movie Night: “Wonder”

NEW LONDON – On Saturday, May 11, at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. enjoy a family fun movie night! The Little Theatre in collaboration with NL Roaming Cinema presents New York Times bestseller, *Wonder*. Free will donation.

Are you an artist or arts facilitator?

The Lakes Area Review supports the local arts community and the role the arts play in our everyday lives. If you’d like to spread the word about your event, project and/or exhibition give us a call at (320) 354-2945 or e-mail: graphics@nllakesareareview.com.



Above, Luci Vasquez welds her metallic chicken, formerly a metallic dragon, at the Ridgewater College welding shop. Below, Vasequez’s mermaid, was submitted in the SkillsUSA contest.

The blue-collar medieval art of Luci Vasquez

By Macklin Caruso Reporter

Luci Vasquez is a single mother of three who works overnights at FedEx to make ends meet. A family getting by on less than \$15 per hour means routine visits to the local food shelf and peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for weeks on end for the Vasquez family. Clothing is purchased at the Goodwill on Tuesdays, because its their weekly half-off Color of the Week sale.

After nearly three years at FedEx Vasquez is facing her final pay cap of \$15 on hour, marginally more than she makes now. That’s not nearly enough for her family to continue subsist as they have been. “As much as I love my job it is kind of a dead-end job,” said Vasquez.

Last year a friend of Vasquez who works for CLUES (Comunidades Latinas Unidas en Servicio), a non-profit to help Latino families find work, told Vasquez about the welding program at Ridgewater College.

The CLUES program offered to provide Vasquez money for gas and food just to attend classes. Looking a for a way out of her dead-end routine, Vasquez obliged.

Vasquez enrolled at Ridgewater, attending class after her 3-7 a.m. FedEx shift.

While taking classes in the welding shop, she was encouraged take part in that years SkillsUSA – a national organization for career and technical students – competition.

Vasquez has always had an interest in metals, but in a dorky Dungeons & Dragons sort of way. When she was a teenager attending migrant school in Bird Island, she was fascinated with blacksmithing a metallurgy.

She filled her days watching movies like “The Pirates of Dark Water,” “Conan the Barbarian,” “Heman,” “Thunder Cats,” and “The Dark Crystal.”

“I wouldn’t call us goth, but we were steam punk,” said Vasquez of her high school friends. She constantly played out doomsday scenarios in her mind. “If the world ended, what would you need? You would need armor.”

She and a classmate decided to take part in the

competition. Their idea was to craft a mermaid out of scrap metals.

“It was massively wonderful in my head,” said Vasquez, though due to time constraints it wasn’t as massive as Vasquez had imagined.

Her final project featured a mermaid, about a foot in length, with copper-orange hair embracing an anchor that glows blue and silver.

She entered her work in the competition and it now sits in the entrance of Ridgewater student art gallery.

However, the project drew unknown inspiration from Vasquez. Welding now extended past a technically proficient field that could provide a livable wage to feed her family. It could be art.

As the Lakes Area Review went to press, Vasquez was working on what was originally supposed to be a metal dragon. Though it didn’t really look like a dragon, more like a chicken.

Vasquez acknowledged this and now her once fearsome dragon is suffering the same humiliating evolutionary track of the dinosaur, and is now a chicken – but for a chicken, it’s formidable.

“I seem to have a knack for it,” said Vasquez. As her welding skills progress she hopes to make life-sized sculptures of humans and horses.

She plans to only use scrap metals in her work, stuff like rail road sticks and barbed wire, because it can be found almost anywhere, and if she doesn’t put it to good use, no one will.

As she nears the final certifications for her welding credentials, Vasquez is feeling optimistic. Starting wages for a welder average \$17 per hour, and only go up from there.

She wants to either move to Alexandria or Rochester due to, according to Vasquez, the booming infrastructure both places have high demand for weld-

ers.

Once she gets settled in her new career, she hopes to further pursue her art. She plans to purchase a shed just to store her art and eventually hopes to sell it. “If I don’t sell it that might be an issue, because I’ll end up with all these sculptures and no where to put them,” said Vasquez.

There are still some career hurdles for Vasquez in the world of welding, however. According to Vasquez, being a woman in welding is a largely uncharted frontier. Even simple things, like buying gloves, is more difficult for Vasquez because they are largely fitted for men, and thus big and bulky on her.

“We need more women in welding,” said Vasquez. She even makes the claims that woman are in some ways better equipped to be a welder, because of the way women think about things. “In some ways, we’re better,” said Vasquez.

It’s not a boy’s club one thinks it would be insists Vasquez. “There is a little bit of ‘oh, you’re a girl,’” said Vasquez, but a lot of that is because they don’t expect it. It’s largely a “non-issue.”

How far one goes in welding its solely determined by one’s determination and skill, and Vasquez is confident she has both. Though starting wages average \$17 per hour, Vasquez maintains with the right determination she will be making closer to \$32 per hour.

This means no more trips to the food shelf with her three kids, no more pinching pennies and no more sharing clothing with her 18-year-old son. “When I get a better job, it’s not going to be like that anymore,” said Vasquez. “We’ll finally be free.”



ART PLACE DIRECTORY

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| GOSSMAN POTTERY 313 1st Ave SE, New London, MN 56273 www.facebook.com/billgossman-pottery Phone: (320) 354-5723 | www.terracemill.org Phone: (320) 278-3728 | 5:30-7pm | /project-3/ http://www.thetravelingmuseum.com/ bergh72@gmail.com andrewandlisa@charter.net | THE BARN THEATER PO Box 342 321 4th St SW Willmar, Minnesota 56201 http://thebarntheatre.com Phone: (320) 235-9500 | www.CEWillmarMN.com Phone: (320) 231-8490 |
| GREENWATER GARAGE 101 S. Main St. New London, MN 56273 kristin@greenwatergarage.com https://greenwatergarage.com Monday Nights: 6-8pm We paint; Tues Nights: 6-8pm Drawing club | HUTCHINSON ART CENTER 15 Franklin SW Hutchinson, MN 55350 info@hutchinsonarts.org Phone: (320) 587.7278 | LAKES AREA RADIO THEATER 2214 Geneva Road NE Alexandria, MN 56308 http://www.lakesareatheatre.com lakesareatheatre@gmail.com (320) 815-7664 | SPICER STUDIO AND GALLERY 125 Lake Avenue North Spicer, Minnesota 56288 Phone: (320) 796.5030 | NEW LONDON LITTLE THEATRE 24 Central Ave E New London, MN 56273 Phone: (320) 354-2559 www.newlondonlittletheatre.com | RIDGEWATER COLLEGE THEATER FINE ARTS BUILDING 2101 15th Avenue NW Willmar, MN 56201 Phone: (320) 222-7605 |
| HISTORIC TERRACE MILL 27165 Old Mill Pond Road Terrace Mill, MN 56334 | JAZZ N’ JAVA / WHITNEY MUSIC 913 Hwy 71 NE Willmar, MN 56201 www.whitneymusic.com Phone: (320) 214-9433 Thurs Night meal & music: 5pm Sat Morn: Bluegrass Jam 8:30-11am Mon Eve After Hours Jam: | NL ARTS ALLIANCE newlondonartsalliance@gmail.com https://newlondonartsalliance.wordpress.com | SPRINGBOARD FOR THE ARTS 201 W Lincoln Ave Fergus Falls, MN 56537 www.springboardforthearts.org Phone: (218) 998-4037 | WILLMAR COMMUNITY EDUCATION 1234 Kandiyohi Ave SW Willmar, MN 56201 | THE RED HEN HOUSE RETREAT CENTER PO Box 6 241 Central Avenue South Brooten, MN 56316 www.theredhenhouse.com Phone: (320) 424.0232 |