

TO: Ginny Grimsley, Florida Division of Cultural Affairs

SUBJECT: Theater with a Mission (TWAM) Grant

FROM: David Triana, President, Conexión Media Group

June 1, 2017

Dear Ginny:

This letter is in support of the application for a grant being processed on behalf of TWAM.

I have had the pleasure of working with Ben Gunter and the tremendously talented group of actors he leads.

As the founder of United for a Good Cause Inc., and the director of the organization's Hispanic Fest, we have had the honor of bringing TWAM to perform at our 2015 and 2016 editions of the Festival and they were a huge hit with everyone. The professionalism, the culture, the art and costumes in their presentations is second to none and people always ask me about them during, after and leading up to this annual event!

In addition, as the President of Conexión Media Group, I have invited TWAM to conduct presentations at several activities our organization leads and likewise, their presentations have been a key element to our events and they continuously receive great response and commentary from the varied attendees which include business people and civic leaders.

In my personal opinion, and having seen them perform several times with such professionalism and passion, TWAM is one of the best groups in our entire state and indeed bring the past history of our proud state to the present. This is of special importance to the society at large, but, even more importantly, to our Florida youth!

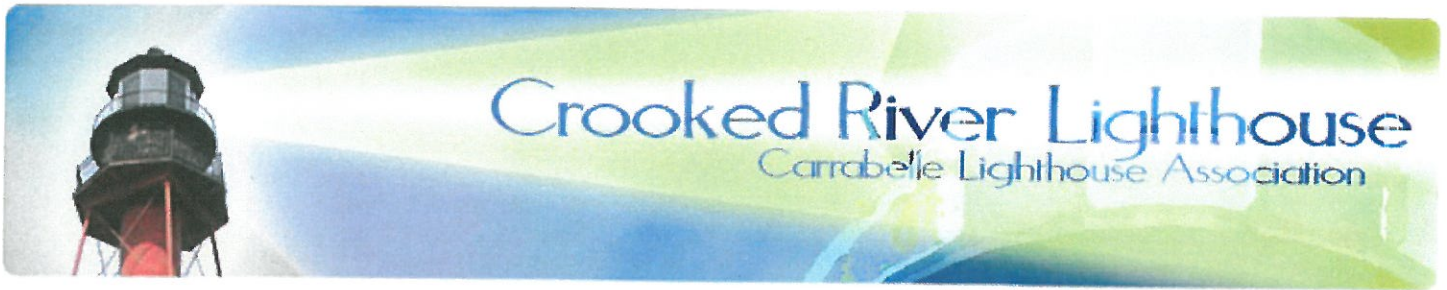
I hope they get this grant and are then able to expand their outreach within and outside of the State as much as possible.

For more information on United for a Good Cause Inc. and Conexión Media Group, please go to: www.unitedforagoodcause.org and www.conexionflorida.com

Please contact me with any questions or concerns @ (850) 368-3505.

David Triana

President, Conexión Media Group



The Crooked River Lighthouse Lantern Fest has been drawing around 300+ people to our modest-sized park. The popularity of this event is growing thanks to the wonderful performers who have found the autumn evening event an opportunity for enchantment! On this night we celebrate the birthday of the lighthouse and display a glowing lantern, like candles on a cake, for each year of the tower's age; now coming up on it's 120th. The party includes beautiful hand made lanterns, theatrical performances, an annual "glow -in -the dark" dance performance from the Tallahassee Community College Dance Company, delicious food, tower climbing and open house in our Keeper's House Museum and Gift Shop.

The Carrabelle Lighthouse Association has been thoroughly impressed with the professionalism, fabulous costumery, historical authenticity and superb acting of the THEATRE WITH A MISSION group. They are just what we are looking for in terms of outdoor theatrical performances and as an event planner, I can't express the value of knowing that I can trust them to do an excellent job! They engage the audience, are loud enough to be heard, and have great comedy and contagious enthusiasm.

I look forward to working with them again. We take pride in networking with local talent and are happy to have developed some lasting partnerships with great companies like THEATRE WITH A MISSION and Tallahassee Community College Dance Company. I hope to see them expand and cover many time periods of Florida History.

Joan Matey
Curator/Program Director
Crooked River Lighthouse Museum, Gift Shop & Park
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Join the Carrabelle Lighthouse Association!



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Ginny Grimsley
R.A. Gray Building
500 South Bronough St.
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Ginny:

Ben Gunter from Theater With a Mission (TWAM) recently shared his extensive Plan for staging a *Loco for Love* Festival. Southern Shakespeare just our third Festival, and can certainly appreciate the detail Ben has incorporated into his blueprint for a successful Festival.

For the first three years of the Southern Shakespeare Festival, TWAM has been an enthusiastic partner, staging productions in our green space. This year, they performed both a shorter version of *Loco for Love* on Friday, and the longer version on Saturday on our Second Stage, with more of the amenities, like sound amplification, that come with professional productions.

The troupe has always been wonderfully creative and extremely professional in their presentations. They have always provided the materials needed to advertise their presence at SSF in a timely manner. They have gone way beyond what other companies at our Festival contribute. It shows a level of commitment to collaboratively working together for the good of the whole event.

I was lucky enough to attend the premiere of *Loco for Love* at Mission San Luis, and was greatly impressed by the innovative staging, the amount of audience interaction, and some very talented performers. Here was a chance to advance an investigation of the literary worlds of Cervantes and Shakespeare that was vibrant, chocked full of information, and FUN!

Ben and Idy are treasures we are lucky to have in Tallahassee, and I highly recommend any project, and specifically THIS one, that Ben is leading. We at SouthernShakes hope to be a partner in this new endeavor.

Sincerely,

Lanny Thomas
Artistic Director
Southern Shakespeare Company



LEROY COLLINS LEON COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY

Inspiring a Love of Reading and a Life of Learning

May 30, 2017

To Whom It May Concern:

It is with great pleasure I write of the marvelous performances by *Theater with a Mission* which we enjoyed during our four Woodville Annual Founders Day Festivals. The Festival was begun to share Woodville's amazing significance and history with Leon County, and to create an opportunity for community engagement. All proceeds from vendor fees benefit the Woodville VFD.

Each year we have had the Woodville Elementary and Charter Middle Schools, Tallahassee Museum, several state and federal parks, the Big Bend Railway Association, local car clubs, churches, merchants, artists and craftsmen, the Tallahassee Writer's Association, Woodville Volunteer Fire Department, state and county agencies, several historical organizations, historical re-enactors, musicians and *Theater with a Mission* join us to celebrate Wonderful Woodville!

The first, inaugural, year we had over 600 attendees at the library alone. This past (second) year, we had over 600 attendees, despite what was quite possibly the worst weather of the winter. (This figure does not include visitors to the J. Lewis Hall Park, where we had vendors located.) Theater with a Mission's actors arrived in historic costume, and interacted with attendees at the library and in the park before and after performances, giving people a first-hand taste of Spanish Florida. Despite the brutal weather (which made us relocate performances inside, to our small community education room), "*Better Wed Than Dead*", a 16th century Spanish farce, attracted as large a crowd as the room could hold; roughly 30 people at each performance. The *TWAM* casts were enthusiastically received both years, at each performance.

This year, our fourth Festival was held completely on the library property. Theater With A Mission gave us two wonderful performances, outside on our shady lawn. We provided chairs for audience members, and the performances were enthusiastically received. The performance area was ringed by vendors of all kinds, who also enjoyed the show! We counted nearly 600 participants through the Library doors, with probably (at least) 75 people watching the performances during the day

We have timed our Festival to follow The Battle of Natural Bridge re-enactment in Woodville. One way the Library supports this event every year is by hosting a lecture from the Florida State Museums. We are proud to provide a space and time to celebrate the amazing history of Florida.

Theater With A Mission and Mr. Gunter have been an absolute joy to work with. His enthusiasm and vision are contagious, and the TWAM performers' generosity has been deeply appreciated by me and our Festival committee. Without a doubt, this group, with their dedication and message, are an absolute treasure for this area as well as to Florida and Georgia. They are extremely well informed, strive for historical accuracy, and make our rich history jump to life for children and adults alike.

It is wonderful to see patrons respond to their first live theater experience, as they experience the magic of performance and imagination. I wish you could see the faces of the audience as they sit on the edge of their seats, completely lost in a moment from long ago. Please consider seriously awarding a grant to TWAM so they can continue providing top-notch theater performances throughout this area, and the state.

I appreciate your time and consideration,

Sincerely yours,

Verna L.S. Brock

Verna L. S. Brock
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Florida Department of State
Division of Cultural Affairs
500 South Bronough Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399

June 1, 2017

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing in support of the Theater With A Mission (TWAM) application for a Division of Cultural Affairs grant intended to fund public outreach activities to raise awareness of Florida's Spanish heritage. I was the original liaison between TWAM and Mission San Luis, and have been involved in living history interpretation of Spanish culture professionally for over ten years. I now manage the Information Center for the Florida Park Service, and I have worked with TWAM in the capacities of actor, costumer and board member.

Living history in combination with theater has the power to bring the past into the present, and to show the public that history is real and relevant – not just names and dates in a dusty tome. What is particularly timely about TWAM's focus on Florida history is the diversity of the figures portrayed -- people of European, African and Native American heritage in a Spanish colonial setting. The mix of cultures, languages, and values in early Florida mirrors the contemporary concerns of our audiences, and this revelation brings understanding and appreciation for our shared past.

The theatrical festival and touring performances that TWAM proposes to use the DCA grant to fund would broaden the company's roster of productions to depict the signing of the Adams-Onís Treaty of 1819 that made Spanish Florida a United States Territory. Other TWAM touring shows have contrasted British writer William Shakespeare with his Spanish contemporary Miguel de Cervantes in their depictions of the story of Cardenio, shown impressions of First Contact between Spanish explorers and Native American tribes, depicted intercultural and religious issues in a reconstruction of a Spanish/Native American wedding, and used humor to address issues of feminine power in a patriarchal society. TWAM's touring productions have gone to Northwest Florida community festivals as well as partnering with Florida Park Service events at locations such as San Marcos de Apalache Historic State Park and Fort Mose Historic State Park. We hope to continue this partnership with tours to other state park locations, including the 2018 Florida Folk Festival at Stephen Foster Folk Culture Center State Park.

I speak from personal experience when I say that exposure to art and living history can change a person for the better and help them understand the perspective of peoples and times outside of their own experience. Please consider awarding this grant to Theater With A Mission, so that they may continue their "Mission" to educate and enlighten their audiences about Florida's Past.



Julie R. Kurisko

Manager, Florida Park Service Information Line