

# Stagebridge brings generations together

**D**o you enjoy singing, dancing or telling stories? Have you ever dreamed of performing on stage? Would you like to brighten the days of seniors and children? A nationally acclaimed Bay Area program invites older adults to try their hand (or feet or vocal chords) at entertaining children and seniors. No previous training or experience is needed.

Stagebridge serves the Bay Area from Oakland. As the nation's oldest senior theater, they are celebrating their 25th year with 100 senior actors, storytellers and students. They entertain 25,000 seniors, children and families a year who may otherwise not enjoy the magic of theater. Participants range in age from 50 to 95, with an average age of 70.

Programs include classes for older adults in acting, storytelling and singing; plays for public audiences; plays for senior centers, retirement homes, hospitals and community groups; and intergenerational theater, oral history and storytelling by older adults for school children in the East Bay, San Francisco and the Peninsula.

"Stagebridge has successfully bridged the age span to become a model community organization committed to dispelling the notion of older adults as obso-



**Roger CORMIER  
& Sandra COHEN**

lete, non-contributing members of society. The company demonstrates the ways in which seniors can improve and enrich our culture by using theater to bridge the generations," says Stuart Kendall, Ph.D., founder and executive director.

A study has shown that children who participate in the company's Storybridge School Program improve their language skills. Another study finds that participation by older adults helps them maintain their physical health and social skills and reduces depression. For Kendall the proof's in the faces of the children and seniors being entertained and engaged by storytellers, singers, dancers and other performers.

Kendall explains that many older people have had no opportunity to act on their long-standing desire to perform. When they are exposed to Stagebridge, it may be a while before they make the time or find the courage to sign up for courses in acting, storytelling or singing.



LINDA SVENDSON

**SENIOR PERFORMER** Vilma Vitanza is part of Stagebridge's intergenerational theater program.

When they take that step, they often discover a passion for the limelight. One woman in her 70s realized her lifetime dream of acting and performed until her late 80s. The staff was struck by how she always managed to get herself in the center of group photos.

Stagebridge, the only senior theater funded by the National Endowment for the Arts, offers several ways to get involved with their dynamic, community-based program. You can join an acting or storytelling class, audition for a variety show, tell stories in schools, make tax-deductible contributions, volunteer to usher, help backstage or assist with the Web site, or treat

yourself to their public performances.

► Tickets are available for "Grandparent Tales," a new play of children's stories from around the world. Performances are scheduled for March 21 and 28 in Oakland. The \$10 tickets include an ice cream social. For more information call (510) 444-4755 or visit [www.stagebridge.org](http://www.stagebridge.org).

Sandra J. Cohen, R.N., and Roger Cormier are consultants who help East Bay families plan and coordinate care of an older relative at home or in a care facility. You can reach them at (510) 652-3377 or (925) 945-8855 or visit [www.ElderCareManagers.com](http://www.ElderCareManagers.com).