

# A visual feast



Actor Jordan Griffiths, third from right, rehearses a scene with fairy-tale creatures for The Key Players' upcoming production of 'Shrek: The Musical.' He will be wearing green prosthetics during the show to portray the ogre Shrek.

## Key Players prep for 'Shrek'

BY CHARLOTTE TWINE  
Free Press Staff

PLANTATION KEY — Last week, the backstage before the first dress rehearsal of The Key Players' production of "Shrek: The Musical" was controlled chaos. The narrow hallway was lined with bulging racks of costumes, and the stage crew was squeezed in with the actors, tailor-fitting the clothes with sewing pins. Producer Janelle Kop was overseeing the action and had it all under control. Barely.

"I'm the producer. And also the co-director," she explained to the Free Press. "And the costumer. The costume lady had to quit for health reasons."

She paused when a man approached her to approve his costume. He was wearing a white shirt, a gold vest and black jeans. Kop thought for a second.

"Do you have a pair of black dress pants?" she asked. "You're supposed to be a king, and a king wouldn't wear jeans."

A young woman walked up wear-



Producer Janelle Kop, left, controls the chaos backstage at the first dress rehearsal of 'Shrek.' Here she helps an ogre find a costume.



A large puppet dragon is but one of many props used in 'Shrek: The Musical.'

ing a guardsman outfit, her sleeves so long they almost touched the floor. She wagged her arms.

"OK, I think I can use this as a nightshirt," she said to Kop, who burst into laughter.

"You need some serious pinning, girl," Kop said.

Add that to Kop's long list of things that need to be done before the opening night of "Shrek," which is Feb. 25. But that's all right; she knew going in that this would be a major undertaking.

Last year, she conceived of producing the Broadway musical with The Key Players to take advantage of co-director Jeremy Wilken's prop-making and production-design skills. Kop has a bold ambition to equal the production quality of the Broadway version.

"We want to blow everyone away," she told the Free Press in the fall.

The scale of "Shrek" is so vast, with so many moving parts, that Kop and Wilken have been working on the production for a year. The audition for the 40-plus roles, encompassing ogres, humans, animals and fairy-tale creatures, took place last fall. To put it in perspective, a usual production for Key Players has a cast of six, maybe nine, tops.

Coordinating the casting took more than 30 hours and 12 volunteers. But Kop is very happy with the final cast, who range in age from 8 to 77 and include locals, snowbirds, stage veterans and rookies. She said the singing will be amazing, and she cites co-director Wilken as an

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## Authors to offer 'The Inside Story' in library series

ISLAMORADA — A free series of conversations on writing and publishing begins at the Monroe County Public Library's Helen Wadley branch on Thursday, Feb. 18.

"The Inside Story: Conversations with Keys Authors" features a notable Florida Keys author each Thursday evening through March. Among those slated to appear are mystery writer Tom Corcoran ("Crime Almost Pays"), culinary crime writer Lucy Burdette, who writes under the pen name Roberta Isleib, ("Fatal Reservations"), thriller writer James W. Hall ("The Big Finish"), author and Rich Products Chairman Bob Rich ("Looking Through Water"), artist/author Kathleen Denis ("Painting Paradise") and Civil War novelist Mike Kenneth Smith ("Home Again").

The hour-long conversations begin at 6 p.m. and



Hall



Corcoran

ed authors who both live in and draw inspiration from the Florida Keys, the library is a perfect venue for this series," said Ozzie Dominguez, manager of the Upper Matecumbe Key-based library. "They have a lot of wisdom to share about getting your story and message to the world at large, as well as insights into the unique qualities and challenges that the Keys present."

"The Inside Story" is organized by Jill Zima Borski and

authors will be available to sign and sell books provided either by themselves or by Hooked on Books in Islamorada.

"With so many dedicat-

nalists as well as authors of, respectively, the memoir "Know That I Have Lived" and a history of the world's

See AUTHORS, page 5B

## Florida Bay book editor to share Buffett story

ISLAMORADA — When book editor Dan Burkhardt needed someone to write the introduction to his coffee-table book about the Everglades and Florida Bay, he couldn't think of anyone more qualified than Jimmy Buffett.

What resulted was an unanticipated original essay where Buffett told the little-known story of how his love of the area developed.

Burkhardt, author of "Florida Bay Forever," will present "How One Movie Hooked Jimmy Buffett on the Everglades and Florida Keys" at 6 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 24, at the Keys History & Discovery Center at the Islander Resort, mile marker 82, oceanside. The center opens at 5 p.m., with a book-signing to follow Burkhardt's talk.

Buffett's songs and stories about the Florida Keys and Key West are well known,

but his love of the Everglades and Florida Keys came about long before his fame. Buffett took his first trip to South Florida in 1958, the same year the movie "Wind Across the Everglades," starring Burl Ives, was released. Upon seeing the movie's colorful cast of characters and its vivid images of the Everglades, Buffett said he was hooked.

Hear from Burkhardt, watch a clip from "Wind Across the Everglades" and view the "Florida Bay Forever" photography exhibit currently on display. For those interested in watching the movie in full, it will be shown in the Discovery Center's theater, starting at 4 p.m., prior to the presentation.

Admission for non-members is \$25. A cash bar will be available. Reservations are recommended and can be made at 305-922-2237 or info@keysdiscovery.com.



# Shrek

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example:

"I had to cast him as Lord Farquaad. His voice is so strong, I had to throw him on the stage."

The title role of the lovable ogre Shrek will be played by Jordan Griffiths, complete with green prosthetics. He found out about the auditions a half hour before they started, but attended anyway, with no preparation.

"He opened his mouth to sing, and we were like holy crap! OMG. And that wasn't prepared?" said Kop.

But perhaps the true star of the production will be the stage design. "Shrek" promises to be a visual feast.

"The props are amazing. Crazy," said D.J. Mills, who plays Donkey. Wilken has been constructing the outsize, colorful props with the help of volunteer stage crew and Coral Shores High School students. He and Kop also scored a large puppet dragon with glowing eyes, guaranteed to draw ohs and ahs from the audience, from a prop company in California called Stage Monkey.

Kop conducted an exhaustive search for more than 100 costumes and bought them from Amazon, Etsy, a clothing company in China and a high school drama club in Long Island. The prop, costume and advertising bud-

get were funded with The Key Players' money and also with grants from local sponsors Keys Accounting, All American Towing and Blue 9 Realty.

"They not only gave us emotional support, but they also got out the checkbook," Kop said. "This is the biggest thing, by far, we've ever done."

Meanwhile, back at rehearsal, the cast was having a blast.

"It's our first dress rehearsal!" shouted Kop to the actors, who had gathered onstage before the run-through. They responded with loud cheers and applause.

Tommy Chambers, who plays the Big Bad Wolf, said, "It's fun. It's fun, it's fun, it's fun. It's work, but it's fun. There's a lot of people, so it's traffic control. We have people playing two to three roles, with two to three minutes to change costumes and makeup. You have to know where you are at all times. It'll get real busy, real quick. It's gonna be a smash."

"Shrek: The Musical" will be performed at Coral Shores High School's Performing Arts Center, mile marker 89.9, ocean-side, at 7:30 p.m. Feb. 25 through 27 and March 3 through 5. Matinees are set for 2 p.m. Feb. 28 and March 6. Tickets are \$10 for youth and \$20 for adults. For more information, go to [thekeyplayers.org](http://thekeyplayers.org).

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CHARLOTTE TWINE/Free Press

Above, The Key Players rehearse a scene set in Lord Farquaad's kingdom during last week's dress rehearsal of 'Shrek: The Musical.'



CHARLOTTE TWINE/Free Press

Above, Seychelle Hattingh, in costume as Pinocchio, enjoys the first dress rehearsal of 'Shrek: The Musical' last week from the audience. Actor D.J. Mills, right, who plays Donkey, relaxes before the first dress rehearsal.



CHARLOTTE TWINE/Free Press

Above, Jordan Griffiths, as lead character Shrek, rehearses a song; he will be wearing green prosthetics in the actual production to portray the ogre.

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