Parishes Unite In A Cooperative
To Bring Artists To Acadia

BY STACEY COURVILLE

Say the word, "cooperative" and many people in Acadia imagine a group of farmers banding together to purchase agricultural supplies at reduced rates. But, the co-op concept in Acadia is also allowing the area's children to learn more about the performing arts.

Through the Acadia Cooperative Arts Education program, a project instituted in Lafayette, Acadia, Iberia, St. Landry, St. Mary and Vermilion parishes, nationally known performers demonstrate and lecture in the schools. The purpose of the program is to introduce the arts to as many students as possible.

Julie Carter, regional arts coordinator for the Acadiana Arts Council, listed reduced cost, higher quality performers and effective screening of the artists as advantages of using a co-op.

"Through the program, we are able to apply for grants which allow performers to visit the area, not only one parish," she said. "This helps reduce the cost because many groups are splitting the cost and the artists are in Acadia longer, reaching more students."

Representatives from each of the parishes serve on a committee which screens the touring artists. Members of the co-op committee select the programs they would like to see introduced in Acadia. Although performances are an important part of the cooperative arts education program, teachers are encouraged to incorporate the works of artists in the students' daily lessons.

Before the artists perform, they provide comprehensive educational material to members of the co-op," Carter said. "Teachers combine this material with their lesson plans to prepare the students for the visit. After the performance, there's a follow-up." The educational material includes background of the works to be performed, as well as activities designed to stimulate students' interest in the productions.

A total of more than 5,000 students were reached through the cooperative arts education program last year and "this coming school year, the program will be even farther reaching," she said. The program for the 1983-84 school year will cost approximately $100,000. State and national grants, as well as money allocated by local school boards and arts councils, will be used to cover the cost.

Next year, ten performing groups will be featured, including the Great American Mime Experience from Georgia, the Texas Opera Theater, the North Carolina Shakespeare Company, the Ririe-Woodbury Dance Company from Utah, the Plexus Mime Theatre from Maryland and Lafayette's L'Orchestre.

Programs are designed for students in the different grade levels. For example, the Asolo Touring Theater is presenting three productions in the upcoming year - "The Nightingale" for grades kindergarten through third, "Step on a Crack," for grades four through eight; and "Hamlet," for grades nine through twelve.

Norman Romero, assistant superintendent of the Vermilion Parish School Board, and Sarah Wyatt, vice president of the Acadiana Arts Council board, are two of the members of the co-op committee. Each said a comprehensive touring artist program could not have been introduced without the Acadiana cooperative arts education program.

"Last year was the first year Acadia parish participated in the program," Mrs. Wyatt said. "It went over very well. Groups from 23 of the 25 public schools, about 8,000 students, were able to participate. We couldn't have reached that many children before."

She said the overwhelming student comment on evaluation forms at the end of the year was "please have some more." Romero said the program is "working beautifully."

"We are able to provide students with cultural education which makes for more well-rounded individuals," he said. "If we tried to hire these people solely on our own, we wouldn't have been able to bring the performers in."