

# *The Dentalium Project* Case Study: Dell' Arte

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## PREFACE

*The Dentalium Project* was conceived by Dell' Arte International in 2001 when the Blue Lake Rancheria, a sovereign native nation that abuts the small northern California town of Blue Lake, decided to secure its financial future by building a casino. Although the Rancheria pledged significant support to the surrounding community, many Blue Lake residents took a dim view of the proposed casino, fearing an increase in traffic, crime, and noise—and, most critically, a loss of power and control over their own destiny. At the same time, they also noted the irony that for many years the Town of Blue Lake had made decisions without input from the 50-member Rancheria.

The Dell' Arte ensemble is recognized nation-wide as one of the leading proponents of “theatre of place,” making theatre pieces that reflect the issues, history, and concerns of the place where they live. Dell' Arte believed that, through its distinct aesthetic of mime, movement, *commedia*, and clowning, and by giving people from Blue Lake and the Rancheria the opportunity to talk with one another about their fears and visions for the future of their place, *The Dentalium Project* (dentalium were beads used as currency by Native Americans) could begin to build necessary bridges between the two toward a healthier whole community.

*The Dentalium Project* consisted of three elements: a series of more than 40 interviews with a wide variety of residents, followed by five community dialogues facilitated by the Cascadia Forum of Arcata; a live radio play with music set in the future on the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the casino, inspired by the themes which emerged from the interviews and dialogues; and a documentary video shown in the community and aiming for broadcast on public television.

*The Dentalium Project* holds lessons about the capacity of a resident theatre to provoke community dialogue and create a space for the safe exploration of conflict. The case study examines issues of representation in the struggles of a majority white theatre company making art about issues involving Native Americans, and documents Dell' Arte's aesthetic considerations and process. And finally, the case study illustrates Dell' Arte's capacity to make an ongoing impact on their community as a corollary of their long-term presence and their willingness to take risks.



The Pancake Flippers of Blue Lake in a scene from *Wild Card*  
Photo by Carol Eckstein.

## BACKGROUND

### Blue Lake

The small town of Blue Lake (pop. 1,200) lies in Humboldt County, California, one of the country's more liberal and libertarian areas: "Where the Sixties Meet the Sea" and the "Emerald Triangle" of marijuana cultivation. Six wild rivers come to the sea in Humboldt County, graced with a long, rocky, and breath-taking coastline. Humboldt County is only a few miles from the Headwaters Forest: 4,000 acres of old-growth redwoods and scene of a protracted environmental war where activist Julia Butterfly sat for two years in a 200-foot-tall ancient redwood tree named Luna.

During the height of the timbering industry (which once accounted for 90% of employment on California's North Coast), Blue Lake was a bustling town with six restaurants and bars, an opera house, and its own railway station: a company-owned town where everyone worked in some way or another for the timber industry. The town diminished with the collapse of the timber industry and numerous river floods. Today there is not even a lake in Blue Lake.

### The Clowns Come to Town

Such a town, served by an airport 30 miles away with direct flights to only three cities, seems an unlikely location for one of the world's foremost centers for the study of physical theatre. But in 1973, Italian *commedia* master Carlo Mazzone-Clementi and his wife, Jane Hill, came to Humboldt County so that Hill could teach at College of the Redwoods. The couple staged a festival in their first year, and in 1974, deeply attracted to the place, bought the 1912 Oddfellows Hall in Blue Lake, a two-story building in the center of town, and co-founded the "Dell' Arte School of Mime and Comedy" (now known as the Dell' Arte International School of Physical Theatre). The Dell' Arte Company mounted its first production in 1975; the ensemble then included Joan Schirle, Jon Paul Cook, and Michael Fields, who later became Managing Artistic Director.

Dell' Arte's theatrical traditions include several age-old styles popular in Europe: *commedia dell' arte*, melodrama and music hall, circus and clowning, and mime. Their work falls into three general categories: experimental plays, often rooted in world myth and literature; family-theatre works; and "theatre of place." Company members, all of whom have trained and studied at the School, have created thirty-five original productions, many of which have toured across the

world to great acclaim. They also stage large community participation events that occur at festivals and fairs or in the streets.

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First viewed as weird interlopers by most Blue Lakers, they determined to set down real roots in its community. With a wry and self-deprecating wit, the Dell' Arte artists share tales of those early days—the community's misperceptions as well as their own. Peter Pennekamp, a long-time admirer of Dell' Arte and director of the Humboldt Area Foundation, relates an early story of a local resident who used to blast his country music at 6 a.m., yelling at students camping in the field to "wake up, you hippies!" During the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary reunion, when the field was again full of sleepy campers, "the same fellow turned on the same music, but yelled, 'wake up, you . . . uhhhh, wake up you . . . you . . . puppet makers.' They knew they had made it. . . . This town of hardcore conservative loggers, and all of a sudden, every time you turn around, there is somebody going by on a unicycle in a clown costume. The town was transformed, and so were the people."

Dell' Arte is widely recognized as an innovator in “theatre of place,” creating from the history, stories, and issues of their home. It is one of eight companies to be extensively researched in *Performing Communities*, commissioned by Art in the Public Interest and available on line through the Community Arts Network. Mark McKenna created a Dell' Arte profile for *Performing Communities* that draws from more than twenty interviews with company artists and a wide range of community members (including Pennekamp):

*Company members are keenly aware of their own presence as community members and have participated as members of city council, the chamber of commerce, the planning commission, arts council and the PTA.*

Creating and performing original plays specifically for and about the people of their area has evolved their philosophy of “Theatre of Place.” Imbedded in this philosophy is the idea that excellence in art can be achieved outside of the urban cultural centers. Dell' Arte also exemplified the idea that theater artists can create work that is independent of the corporate formulaic mentality where product creation is driven by an analysis of the marketplace. Company members are keenly aware of their own presence as community members and have participated as members of city council, the chamber of commerce, the planning commission, arts council and the PTA. The community has grown to trust Dell' Arte through these relationships and through the company's reliability as collaborators and their history of follow-through.

#### **Dell' Arte in Action**

Dell' Arte now employs 15 people full-time (including the six-member core ensemble, resident designers, and production staff) and ten part-time workers, making it the largest arts employer in California north of the Bay Area and, until recently, the largest employer in Blue Lake. Their historic wood-frame building holds a theatre, classrooms, and offices; an outdoor stage faces the back lawn; artists are housed in a guest apartment down the street. The budget hovers around \$1.2 million. The board structure reflects the artist-driven heart of Dell' Arte: the legal governing body of seven (all past or present members of the ensemble) elects a board of directors that meets annually. Dell' Arte is one of America's longest-running ensembles.

Since 1975 Dell' Arte has attracted students from all over the world to a program of intense physical training; it is the only place in the U.S. to offer an MFA in Ensemble-Based Physical Theatre. During the summer, Dell' Arte offers one- to four-week workshops, often led by distinguished international artists. The annual Mad River Theatre Festival is a month-long event with dozens of performances, drawing over 5,000 people every summer.

Dell' Arte also runs a Youth Academy, begun in 1991 as one of six nation-wide pilot programs. At one time, funding allowed every child in Blue Lake to work with a Dell' Arte artist every year, using physical theatre work based in curriculum standards. The program expanded to reach over 4,000 elementary school students throughout Humboldt County. The Academy offers innovative after-school and summer programs for elementary and high school students.



Michael Fields as Buddy O'Hanlan in *Wild Card*.  
Photo by Carol Eckstein.

## Art Responds to Life

Surrounded on three sides by Blue Lake is the 40-acre Rancheria, a sovereign nation that is home to about 50 Native Americans of mixed tribal heritage (mostly Weott). A brief history lesson is in order: more than thirty Native American villages were once scattered along the rivers of the upper North Coast. In 1855–1860 many lost their homes, either killed or re-located by U.S. government policies; in 1908 the remaining few were gathered onto a tiny scrap of land. In 1955, the U.S. government decided to terminate the tribes altogether, issuing land deeds to the local Native Americans and simply declaring they were henceforth no longer Native Americans with treaty rights. For twenty years the Native Americans fought in the courts, and in 1983 the Blue Lake Rancheria regained its federal status.

For generations, the City of Blue Lake conducted its business with little regard for the Rancheria, locating the sewage treatment plant and garbage dump on the Rancheria's borders, and once

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trying to build a road right through it without consultation. Therefore it was ironic justice when the Rancheria decided to build a casino, without consulting the city.

The issue of Indian casinos is hotly contested all across the country, even by some members of the tribes who build and benefit from them. Reasonable people have a wide

range of passionate opinions about the casino: a combination of greed, despair, hope, fantasy, and opportunity. (This issue is explored in greater depth in David Rooks' essay, "To save paradise they put up a parking lot." See Critical Perspectives, below.)

The 45,000-square-foot, \$30-million facility (with the largest parking lot in the county) broke ground in July 2001; tribal leaders anticipated a payroll of \$7 million a year and nearly 300 employees, eclipsing Dell' Arte's role as the largest local employer. "There could be more people at the casino at any given time than there would be living in the rest of the town," said one Blue Lake councilman. Profits would fund public transit, especially for the elderly, provide free school lunches for elementary students, and build a retirement community, not limiting these benefits to Native Americans. According to Arla Ramsey, Rancheria tribal chair, this arrangement is unusual: most tribal casinos issue monthly or lump-sum payments only to enrolled tribal members. But the Rancheria's generosity did not allay the fears and concerns of many Blue Lake leaders. As Kit Mann, businessman and former planning commissioner, confided, "I personally felt violated. My life, my home, my community will be changed in ways I can neither control or contribute to, in ways that I don't like."

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Along with the rest of Blue Lake, Dell’ Arte recognized immediately that the casino meant changes—big changes—bigger than the floods, the decline of the timber industry, or even the arrival of the clown school. Sensing that fear of change (of shifts in economic power structures, as well as increases in traffic, crime, and noise) could further polarize the small community, Dell’ Arte saw an opportunity to create a relevant work of art that might facilitate a genuine dialogue. Although Dell’ Arte had a history of artistic collaboration with the Karuk tribe, they had had minimal interaction with the Rancheria. Nonetheless, Dell’ Arte approached the Rancheria with their idea, inviting their participation in *The Dentalium Project*, named after the beads that local Native Americans used as currency. The Rancheria responded to Dell’ Arte with guarded but genuine interest.

Dell’ Arte found funding support from Animating Democracy for a three-fold project: community dialogues, a professional 50-minute video documentary, and *Wild Card*, an original script performed during the Mad River Festival in 2002 (Ultimately, there were two versions of the script, as feedback from the premiere was incorporated into *Wild Card 1.5* in summer of 2003).

Dell’ Arte had a long history of site-specific satire, most notably in *The Korbel Trilogy* (1994–1996), which lampooned the politics and practically every person (living or dead) in Blue Lake. For the most part, residents enjoyed the gentle (and sometimes not-so-gentle) fun; many were eager to take a role in the productions. For Dell’ Arte, *Korbel* served as a kind of community dialogue sustained over time, each new edition incorporating community response from the previous production. *The Dentalium Project* was thus a natural evolution for a theatre in dialogue with its community.

## THE PROJECT

### Community Dialogue

The Cascadia Forum, a leadership-development and community-building organization in nearby Arcata, was a logical partner for the civic dialogue aspect of *The Dentalium Project*. Julie Fulkerson, a principal in the Cascadia Forum, had appeared in *The Korbel Trilogy* and in 1998 had joined Dell’ Arte’s board of directors. The connection seemed obvious and organic.

Cascadia and Dell’ Arte first identified key individuals (mayor and city council, Rancheria elders, and other community leaders) who in turn recommended other people who had an interest in the community and how it develops over time. One person led to another; multiple perspectives were sought, especially a range of opinion about the proposed casino.

From September 2001 through the spring of 2002, Fulkerson, along with her colleagues, Mary and Roger Gelinias-James, interviewed more than forty local residents, surfacing critical issues. In addition to the expected concerns about the casino, residents also expressed disappointment with the lack of effective city leadership. Fulkerson reported that “people were engaged because it’s so clear that change is happening in the place you love and you weren’t a part of the decision.” The



“It Sucks for Jane,” a song about living on the main road to the casino.

Photo by Carol Eckstein.

themes that emerged from the interviews would give shape and focus to Dell' Arte's creation of the play, *Wild Card*. These initial conversations made clear, as Dell' Arte's interim report says, "that Dell' Arte was definitely not perceived as neutral, neither as a space or in point of view." In fact, one interviewee opined that "Dell' Arte should have been run out of town years ago."

As Cascadia conducted the 40+ interviews, they asked every person if they were interested in continuing the conversation with others; all but one said "yes." Cascadia and Dell' Arte then worked together to design a structure and process for the community dialogues that followed.

The first dialogue was an internal one in January 2002 with the entire Dell' Arte staff to test the process, and for company members to hear—often for the first time—each other's opinions about the casino. Among other things, this dialogue inspired one of *Wild Card*'s original songs, "It Sucks for Jane," based on Joan Schirle's experience of living on the main road to the casino, along with six other homeowners (four of whom were Rancheria members). But as Schirle says, "it really isn't a matter of whether we wanted it or not. What the goal of all this work is, is to try to get people talking to each other, to build a bridge."

A small informal dialogue was held at the Rancheria; then three other community dialogues were held in the spring of 2002 in the local Grange Hall (perceived as a neutral site). Cascadia's challenge was to make the three community groups diverse by profession and interests, opinions on the casino, and length of time in town (the *born-here's* and the *come-here's*). Each of the five groups met once, for about three hours each. "We set a tone," Fulkerson says, "that the dialogue was a chance to sit and talk without an agenda. . . . The stories that people told provided the topics, but the goal was really to show the simple power of listening, people feeling heard." For many, this was the first time that Blue Lake and Rancheria residents had sat down together to talk, to listen, and to learn from each other.

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Although Dell' Arte was certainly eager to hear the stories, they made an early decision to keep a low profile in the dialogues, to prevent participants from self-censoring out of fear of seeing themselves represented onstage. In addition, the dialogues were not recorded. As Fulkerson said, "I think Dell' Arte had a split task: finding material for the piece and promoting community development (through dialogue)."

## Art at the Heart

### *The play*

*Wild Card* is set in the future, during the celebration of the casino's Tenth Anniversary in 2012.

The local Chamber of Commerce has invited local-boy-made-good, Buddy O'Hanlan, to be

master of ceremonies for a special radio broadcast on KRUD. O'Hanlan, garbed in red-white-and-blue sequins and a knowing wink, is the renowned radio personality host of "There's No Lake So Begone." Appearing with O'Hanlan is the "Little Sally Mulligan Band" (known in real life as the very popular local group, the "Joyce Hough Band") and the "No Lake Players." Fields wrote the script; Hough and drummer Tim Gray, along with Fields and ensemble member, Dawn Falato, wrote the lyrics; Gray, Falato, and guitarist Fred Neighbor wrote the original music.



The No Lake Players announce "We Got a Grant!"

Photo by Carol Eckstein.

Rising to the challenge of putting a radio show “on its feet” with Dell’ Arte’s trademark physicality, ensemble member Oliver Steck created live sound effects, providing visual antics while adding aural texture. True to its concept as a live radio show, the Sunday matinee on June 30, 2002 was broadcast live by KHSU, the local PBS affiliate, enabling thousands of people in the predominately rural area to hear the show.

The play is in a variety show format; the audience is welcomed by Richard (“Dick”) Dick, President of the Chamber of Commerce, who summarizes events since 2002: he recalls the economic growth, the boom and bust, the geriatric riots of 2008, with lots of inside jokes, clearly exaggerating local fears. Chief among the special guests are the “No Lake Players” (including one with a red clown nose, homage to Dell’ Arte’s history) who poke fun at themselves with the skit, “We Got a Grant”—“*They want us to have the play incorporate Native American issues related to the casino, reparations, and cultural division built up over 200 years of genocidal history as well as address issues of long-term community development, growth, and odor easements . . .*”) and the song “You Can’t Say That” about political correctness:

You’ve got some things to say.  
You want to tell them how you feel.  
But you’re afraid they’ll be offended  
And that would be too real.

Several local (mostly fictional) celebrities make guest appearances: The Pancake Flippers, Mike of Mike’s Meats, the curmudgeon who guards the public levee as if it were his own (based on a real person), and the spiritual leader of the First Church of Selfish-Determination and Prosperity, Swedish Rite #4. The Blue Lake City Council appears as a boy band, singing “No, we don’t have a plan, but we’re the only ones who ran, Here we go now.”

*“If you look about this stage, I think you might notice something missing (pause). See it? There are no Indians in this play.”*

The play concludes with a call-in portion of the radio show (O’Hanlan: “I’d like to hear how you folks would play the wild card. . .”). Blue Lake residents (including the former postmaster and the owner of the Logger Bar) pre-recorded the first four responses. Then O’Hanlan takes the mic into the audience and asks them for their opinions; the last to take the mic are two children (played by Fields’s own) who bring the focus back to the future: “*Is there gonna be anything here for me? Or am I just gonna get out the first chance I get? I don’t know.*”

Much of *Wild Card*’s more serious content was conveyed in the songs. O’Hanlan introduces a somber note in the middle of the second act:

If you look about this stage, I think you might notice something missing (pause). See it? There are no Indians in this play. The biggest event in 10 years in this town and no one from that community is up here. Now to be fair, we did ask. But the cultural gap might just be too wide. Do you find yourself with that stale taste of guilt in your mouth? Why is that? A voice is silent. Before Starbucks, Casino’s, and Dick Dicks and City councils and lumber mills and gold rushes and white people—this voice was here by the river. I am not saying that I agree with all the choices about the casino and where that all led—it’s the silence that bothers me—the silence born of others not wanting to listen. (To the band) It’s all yours, little Sally.

(first chorus) . . . Now for thousands of years they lived over here  
Then the white people came along  
Then we took all their land

And killed all their clan  
Then we broke into a country song  
So it gripes my butt  
Every time some nut  
Acts like he don't know  
Why there's no Indians in this show.

Directed by Joan Schirle, Dell' Arte's co-artistic director, the play enjoyed great critical acclaim both locally and regionally: "a wonderfully wacky, witty and wise look at the town's present concerns and the 'what ifs' of its future. . . . at the top of their game," said the critic of *The Humboldt Beacon*. All performances sold out, and community interest was sufficient to revive the play (with a revised script) for the Mad River Festival of 2003, where it was again a popular hit.

### **The video**

Filmmaker Jan Kraepelien, in conjunction with PBS affiliate KEET, originally intended to follow five people with different points of view throughout the casino process, from ground-breaking to grand opening. But the scope gradually widened to interweave clips from *Wild Card* performances, the casino construction, and additional interviews capturing audience response to the production.

Central to the documentary are the contrasting perspectives of Ramsey, the Rancheria chairwoman; the casino financial officer, Eric Ramos (also a Rancheria member); Kit Mann, local businessman; and city councilman Brian Julian. The video serves as a small taste of the project's many interviews. Similarly, after a *Wild Card* performance, Dell' Arte convened a small dialogue, facilitated by Fulkerson; Kraepelien recorded this dialogue as well and used some of the footage in his documentary, thus providing insight about the dialogue process itself.

Two previews of the rough-cut documentary were shown for the community in January 2003, followed by an audience dialogue facilitated by the Cascadia Forum. The video has been re-edited for eventual broadcast on public television.

### **Making the Art: Aesthetic Considerations**

Creating a new play demands a myriad of artistic decisions: should it be a tragedy, a comedy, a tragi-comedy, a melodrama, a musical, a pageant? Feeling at their deepest core that serious issues and social critiques were best presented with humor, Dell' Arte decided on a comedy with music, for maximum popular attraction. As Fields says in *Performing Communities*, "We have this rule of thumb for the work we do here. It has got to appeal to people who have never seen a play before."

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At the same time, Dell' Arte also had to decide *where* to stage the play: in the 120-seat indoor theatre? Scattered through the studios and classrooms? In the streets and storefronts? Or in their outdoor theatre, with its grassy lawn under the stars? Dell' Arte believed that being outside, in a less formal environment, would be the most conducive way to air sensitive issues in a way that people could respond.

A final aesthetic consideration became the project's greatest point of contention, the inclusion of the Native American voice. In Dell' Arte's final report, Fields outlines their dilemma:

In the past 10 years we have rarely hired anyone into the company who has not gone through the training program. This is what gives the company its ensemble style and value. In this project, where we sought a Native American voice, ensemble experience became particularly problematic as we did not want a symbolic Native American spokesperson—which we felt would be more demeaning than valuable and would make that point of view especially sacred, which it is not, especially around the casino issue. Ultimately we could not find a resolution to this problem that we all felt good about. And that concerns us deeply. The solution, it seems to us, is to find a way to train Native American actors who wish to seriously go into this work...In one of the new openings created through this project, we are talking with the Rancheria about offering a Native American scholarship to the Dell' Arte International professional training program each year. Training would hopefully provide an equity of craft and could be employed to support multiple points of view. But it is our belief that this has to be addressed in an organic, comprehensive fashion, not a symbolic one.

Dell' Arte has always made a distinction between the company's own work, which aspires to the highest levels of craft, and its community work, where lesser-trained performers can have significant presence and impact. The decision to make this project a company work was in part dictated by Dell' Arte's conviction that issues affecting the long-term quality of life in Blue Lake demanded the highest possible levels of craft.

### **Critical Perspectives**

Through its *Critical Perspectives* writing experiment, the Animating Democracy Initiative wanted to encourage more critical and reflective writing about a few of its thirty-two national projects. The idea was to bring forward multiple perspectives and voices on these projects poised at the intersection of art and civic life. Dell' Arte volunteered and chose three writers of diverse backgrounds: David Rooks, an Oglala Lakota Sioux tribal member and journalist from South Dakota; Ferdinand Lewis of southern California, a playwright and arts writer with a particular interest in cultural planning; and Jim O'Quinn of New York City, arts critic and editor of *American Theatre* magazine. The three visited Blue Lake to see *Wild Card*, talk to various community members, and write a response.

O'Quinn's essay, "[Notes on Wild Card](#)," includes an in-depth analysis of aesthetic choices (staging the play outdoors, as a radio show, with music, and as a satire) and what these decisions reveal about the company's values and working process. O'Quinn particularly notes that "the craft-centered company was intent upon avoiding 'the elevation of dialogue over art,' something they had seen in other theatrical efforts."

Ferdinand Lewis's essay, "[The Arts and Development: An Essential Tension](#)," explores in some depth the balancing act that Dell' Arte attempted: "... the more contradictory the context, the more difficult it could become for artists to establish and maintain an outside perspective while remaining civically engaged."

Dell' Arte certainly expected a reaction to the song, "Why There Are No Indians in this Show," and Rooks takes this as his point of departure in his essay, "[To save paradise they put up a parking lot](#)," which, among other themes, is critical of the negative impact of casinos on native traditions. Rooks also takes Dell' Arte to task for its failure to include the native voice.

In order to deepen the exchange, Fields was invited to write [A Response to the Essays](#). All four essays can be read in their entirety at [www.americansforthearts.org/animatingdemocracy](http://www.americansforthearts.org/animatingdemocracy).

## LEGACY AND LESSONS LEARNED

### Dell' Arte

Partially in response to Rooks and others (including Dell' Arte's own internal critique), Dell' Arte decided to more aggressively pursue Native American actors. The challenge is that Dell' Arte's style of European-based physical comedy does not have a tradition in most Native American cultures. If Dell' Arte wanted to include skilled native actors in a more systematic way, Dell' Arte would have to develop them. Consequently, Dell' Arte established a scholarship for a student from the Rancheria, although no one has yet accepted the invitation. In the meantime the School has "radically diversified through more effort on our part, but also because people are arriving for the first year of our MFA," says Fields.

In addition to the absence of a native actor and a native voice, the original production revealed another fault line. Fields writes that "laughter is a biological response of recognition," reflecting in the Dell' Arte's final report:

....my regret as a playwright, and a problem of the (first) piece, was that I did not feel comfortable making fun of the Native American community in the same way I felt comfortable making satire of all the other elements of the community. The fact that we could not find the appropriate humorous angle on that community was a drawback in the work....

In response, Dell' Arte re-wrote *Wild Card 1.5* to include a local Native American actress who plays O'Hanlan's former sweetheart (and cracks a lot of Indian jokes).

Dell' Arte later applied the lessons from *The Dentalium Project* in a major grant from the Lila Wallace/Reader's Digest Foundation. "How that program was structured was a direct learning," says Fields. "We didn't want to force collaborations where there isn't enough ground to collaborate on—you don't overcome 100 years of genocide in a play." So instead of looking for collaborators to create a play, Dell' Arte looked for partners to develop audiences and venues. Dell' Arte will work with two specific communities—Native American and Hispanic (whose population has tripled in recent years)—through their respective health centers. Beginning in the 2005 Mad River Festival, the two centers will be responsible for curating five days of performance apiece. Grant funds will provide for a portion of performance fees and two half-time liaisons (the Native Center already had a cultural programmer). Fields anticipates a "great cross-pollination of audiences. In planning meetings, they're finding out things about each other—it'll be a process of education and discovery to identify the artists."

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### Blue Lake and the Rancheria

A character from *The Korbel Trilogy* appeared in *Wild Card*: O'Hanlan's dead aunt, Dorothy Dugan, brings advice from beyond the grave for people worried about Blue Lake changing for the worse: "If you people care at all what's going to happen here—you better get your keisters in gear and start doing something about keeping it special." This is the core message in *Wild Card*, a message that several people took to heart.

Directly motivated by the play, two people immediately announced their bid to run for Blue Lake City Council. In July 2002, a story by Kevin Hoover in *The Arcata Eye* begins, "Dell' Arte's

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rambunctious comedy *Wild Card* has had its first verifiable political impact—a candidate for Blue Lake City Council, Marlene Smith...an emerging interest in the office was catalyzed by the mutant vision of a future Blue Lake expressed in *Wild Card*.” During her campaign, Smith

discovered that only one of the five current council members had actually visited the Rancheria to learn about the casino. With two issues on her mind (annexation as a key to managed growth, and community relations between the city and the Rancheria), Smith was elected in the November 2002 elections. Since her election, she has created a formal Rancheria/Blue Lake liaison. Tribal chair Ramsey reports that the Rancheria and the City are now “working together on quite a few projects,” thanks to a new city manager and a growing awareness of the common ground of “how we feel about where we live.”

Following the January 2003 showings of the video, the community initiated its own dialogues between the residents of Blue Lake and the Rancheria. One fact has facilitated an easier exchange: many of the feared consequences from the casino (traffic, noise, drugs, etc.) haven’t materialized, primarily because, as Ramsey says, “we did lots of research about successful casinos and their strong management teams: they really enforce the policies and procedures which nip drug and crime problems in the bud.” In addition, the Rancheria is infusing casino profits into the local infrastructure: thousands of dollars granted to various city and county departments such as recreation and the sheriff’s office (enough for the salaries of three deputies).

In an interview with writer Lewis, Ramsey indicated that the “dialogues had given the Rancheria the opportunity to present its case . . . in a spirit of goodwill and cooperation.” Julie Fulkerson said, “It’s clear that everything has quieted down considerably. The Rancheria handled the physical challenge, showed itself open to community input.” As Ramsey puts it, “the snake in the grass turned out to be a water hose.” (Among other considerations, the Rancheria designed the lighting in the parking lot to reduce excessive ambient light, and designed traffic routing to lessen potential impact on a school.) As Mann says in the video, “I can only hope that at the end of this dialogue, bad things might still happen, but I can trust these people and trust the process—we can make it work. I’m open to saying, ‘I had big fears and they were not realized.’”

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Dell’ Arte’s capacity to make a long-term impact on the community is a corollary of the group’s long-term presence and their willingness to take risks. As stated in the Dell’ Arte final report, “A central factor for us in this project is that we do live here. We didn’t come in, talk, make art and leave. We see these people every day. It is our home as well. The future at stake belongs to all of us.”

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