

Monday, October 17, 2011

## **Science Alliance LIVE! Staging Plays to Spark Children's Interest in Climate Change**

If there is an entertaining way to get children interested in science – and specifically in climate change and water quality research – Jenifer Alonzo is determined to come up with it.

The Old Dominion University assistant professor of communication and theatre arts has joined forces with oceanographers, education faculty and others at the university to explore ways to make learning fun. Their Science Alliance Live!, with Alonzo serving as artistic director, presents its first public event on Saturday, Nov. 5.

Alonzo has written two plays aimed at young audiences, one about the climate change research in the Arctic region by Victoria Hill, ODU research assistant professor in the Department of Ocean, Earth and Atmospheric Sciences (OEAS), and the other about Chesapeake Bay water quality and public health research by Fred Dobbs, ODU professor of OEAS.

In addition to the interactive stage performances, which will involve puppets, the event will include live music, virtual visits to the Arctic and a chance for children to participate in a documentary film about science education.

Children will see themselves on television in the arctic using green screen technology and they may participate in the making of a documentary film about science education. Children who come to the event will also be among the first to play a computer game based on Dr. Victoria Hill's research.

In "Tuk in the Arctic," children will meet Tuk, a Canadian Inuit dog, who protects Hill from polar bears, helps her get over her homesickness and learns how to collect samples from the sea ice. Tuk discovers that studying the sea ice in the Arctic can help children in Hampton Roads prepare for sea level rise.

In "Enzo Murray: Science Reporter," children will join Enzo as she navigates a world of overblown media messages. She meets Dobbs, who helps her understand the processes of data collection and research that help scientists understand how

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microbial life changes when waters warm. Enzo learns the importance of hand washing and also to think critically about media messages.

Children 5-12 are the target audience of the event, although Alonzo said it should be of interest to people of all ages.

The Nov. 5 event will be from 10 a.m. until noon in the University Theatre on Hampton Boulevard, between 46th and 47th streets. It is free, but, because seating is limited, tickets must be reserved by calling 3-3391 or emailing [odusciencetheatre@gmail.com](mailto:odusciencetheatre@gmail.com). Parking is available in Garage D between 45th and 46th street and in the lots at 46th and Monarch Way and 46th and Killam Avenue.

Science Alliance Live! was developed after Alonzo, Hill, Dobbs and Amy Adcock, ODU associate professor of science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) education and professional studies, received \$45,000 in support earlier this year from the university's Office of Research. The grant, which sprang from the ODU Climate Change and Sea Level Rise Initiative, is titled "Scientific Awareness Through Theatre: Inspiring Young People to Value Scientific Practice as We Adapt to Sea Level Rise and Climate Change."

As part of the grant project, Adcock has begun work on Web-based games to augment lessons presented by the Alonzo plays.

Larry Atkinson, the ODU Slover Professor of Oceanography who directs the Climate Change and Sea Level Rise Initiative, praised the interdisciplinary collaboration behind the Alliance. "Who would have thought that a faculty member in theatre arts would be working on a project with oceanographers? This would not have happened without the networking brought about by our Climate Change and Sea Level Rise Initiative."

Other ODU faculty members working with the Alliance are Stephen Pullen, associate professor of communication and theatre arts, and Ginger Watson, associate professor of STEM education and professional studies.

Paula Lancelotti is the Alliance's production administrator.

As a writer and director, Alonzo specializes in the creation of new work for the stage. Her recently written "Mary Anning: Girl Fossil Hunter" is a play about how a young girl made one of the most important scientific discoveries of the 19th century.