

Cultural Cluster Theatre, Music, Art



Photo by David Gibb | www.dgibbphoto.com

ASHLAND, OR - Ask Cynthia Rider why any business would want to locate in Southern Oregon and you will get an impassioned monologue: "People move here because they love this place. It's not any one thing. The quality of life here is so special. It's everything from the obvious natural beauty to the variety of resources. We have the university, one of the nation's leading theaters, a great high school, wonderful restaurants and shops—and you can get to any of these things in 15 minutes.

"We have a 'cultural cluster' of theater, music and art. We enjoy the amenities of a big city like New York or Boston or San Francisco without the wear and tear of daily life in a big city. You can get to a hike on Grizzly Peak in 30 minutes. You can get to Crater Lake in an hour and a half. You just can't do that from many places."

The Oregon Shakespeare Festival (OSF) is a major economic driver with a \$34-million budget and 600 employees. More than 400,000 tickets are sold to its 11 productions throughout each 9-month season.

by Chris Cook

Cynthia Rider,
Executive Director of the
Oregon Shakespeare Festival
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Tourism is big business in Southern Oregon. Eighty-five percent of the festival's visitors drive more than 2 ½ hours to get there. This helps make it possible for those other theater companies, music venues and festivals, shops, restaurants, B&Bs, wineries, jet boat rides and whitewater rafting trips to flourish here.

"Ashland is a thriving city thanks to all members of the community—including OSF," Cynthia explains. "The people we are attracting are intellectually curious—as are Ashland residents—and we all benefit from that creative energy. In addition, the company and staff are active members of the community and we bring that energy to the community just like the academics and scholars from Southern Oregon University (SOU)."

The festival has a long partnership with SOU. SOU is home to the Center for Shakespeare Studies and offers one of the country's best theater majors—both undergraduate and at the master's level. Student actor apprentices work at the festival each summer, OSF company members guest direct SOU productions and teach classes, and OSF relies on the university to provide well-trained graduates in many disciplines including information technology and marketing.

Another local partnership includes the Ashland Coalition, an informal monthly gathering where Cynthia joins leaders from the Ashland Chamber of Commerce, Asante Ashland Community Hospital, the city administrator, president of SOU and the school superintendent. They support each other and coordinate goings on in a friendly cooperative spirit.

As OSF continues to grow, it relies on partnerships with local firms—for banking, legal and landscape services, along with selling local wines, coffees and confections. Local contractor Adroit Construction recently built the new \$7.4-million production facility and will be building the new rehearsal hall. Medford-based ORW Architects designed both.

As the center point of the cultural cluster in Southern Oregon, the Oregon Shakespeare Festival is a standout. And it's another good reason to move a business to Southern Oregon.



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Costumes from OSF make their mark around the nation, "Saturday Night Live" recently rented two costumes for a skit on King Richard III.

THE SOUTHERN OREGON
EDGE

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