It’s been a season of recognition for teacher/director/humanitarian Mark Melamed.

First there was the announcement in April that the stage at Veterans Memorial School in Vineland would be named after him—the Mark Melamed Stage—where so many of the student productions directed by him have found a home.

Then, next week on May 22, he will receive the South Jersey Cultural Alliance 18th Annual Encore Award, given to individuals who have contributed significantly to the development and appreciation of the arts, history and culture in the area. The presentation will be held at the Landis Theater in Vineland.

Multiple roles

The recipient is well known in the Vineland community, not only for his contributions as Memorial School teacher and theater director for all four of Vineland’s middle schools, but also for the “Gabriel Project,” a non-profit organization which he founded in 1990 to provide life-saving surgery to children throughout the world. Connecting the project to his work at school, he enlisted his students to help with fund raising.

Regarding the name designation of the stage at Memorial School, principal Joe Camardo said, “It’s like the lifetime achievement award they give at the Academy Awards. He’s someone who has inspired people in many different ways.”

Although his activities have been somewhat curtailed by a battle with pancreatic cancer and though he is now retired from teaching at Memorial School, Mr. Melamed continues to be active in the theater. He recently was fully involved as director of a revue, “Broadway Classics Revisited,” for students in Vineland’s middle schools.

Background

He came from Pennsylvania to Vineland at age 8 and has lived there ever since, describing his childhood in Vineland as “a great place to grow up.” He taught language arts for 25 years and social studies for 15 years before retiring in 2011. In a film about the Gabriel Project he said that although he has never married or had children of his own, “My school kids and my colleagues have been my substitute family.”

In addition to his teaching responsibilities and humanitarian efforts he has also been active in local theater groups as well as some professional appearances in the “soap opera,” General Hospital. One of the stars of the show, Jackie Zeman, who plays nurse Bobbie Spencer, is a personal friend. She commented in an interview reproduced online that “Mark’s dedication to the project and the children is overwhelming” and said she and fellow cast members have lent their support.

“Hecked” on theater

He also did two episodes of a TV comedy, The Parkers, where he played the college store owner. The show starred Mo’Nique, comedian/actress who later won an Academy Award for her role in the movie Precious.

(Continued on page 2)
They call them “HomeFronts,” with a deliberate play on words. But the team of architects, designers and activists in the Center for Historic American Building Arts—CHABA, coming together for their first workshops on affordably preserving homes and neighborhoods in Bridgeton’s Historic District—mean to have some serious impact in real time.

The first in their series of “preservation clinics” will take place Saturday, May 18, in the Main Reading Room of the Bridgeton City Library, 150 East Commerce Street, from 1-3 p.m.

Organizers say landlords and tenants, builders and craftspeople, people who own or rent space in historic homes, and plain folks at every income level with diverse interests in community, housing and history are all welcome to come and interact with the CHABA team.

“We’re looking to open a real dialogue in a safe space where people can vent their issues, vision possible futures together, get some free information and help, and really learn some good stuff,” says Flavia Alaya, cultural historian and longtime preservation advocate, who heads CHABA and helped put together the program. Topics to be aired are: How does an Historic District work? What makes it a good thing for everybody? How does it impact quality of life, health and safety? And how can these be actively protected by all of us?

Several CHABA participants are Spanish-speaking and ready to assist with translating. A Spanish translation of the Bridgeton Design Guidelines is also in the works.

For more information, visit www.historicbuildingarts.org.

**Memorial Day ceremony to celebrate Emancipation Proclamation anniversary**

The Broad Street Cemetery Association (BSCA) of Bridgeton invites the community to a ceremony celebrating the 175th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation on Monday, May 27, from noon until 3 p.m.

Jim Bergmann, author and historian, will conduct a tour of the cemetery highlighting tombstones of special interest. Choirs from the Trinity AME Church of Gouldtown, the Mt. Zion Church of Bridgeton, and the First Presbyterian Church of Bridgeton will provide commemorative music in the historic Broad Street Church. Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) and Civil War re-enactors will once again provide a bugler playing taps and will fire a Civil War cannon as a final salute to honor the military.

Members of the BSCA, together with scores of volunteers, have restored the ten-acre Broad Street Church cemetery over a three-year period. Through the efforts of the Bridgeton Fire Department, the Boy Scouts, many Bridgeton High School athletes, and in-kind donations, the cemetery is now an historic park with old trees, lawns, and an ornate iron fence around the perimeter.

There is no charge for this event.

**Local teacher/humanitarian wins this year’s Encore Award (Continued from page 1)**

He said he got involved in the theater at age 8 when his parents, who were active in the Little Theatre of Vineland, told him about a part of a shoeshine boy in *Guys and Dolls*.

“I shined the shoes of one of the gangsters (in the show) and he flipped me a 50 cent piece,” he recalled. “If I caught it, he told me, I could keep it—and I was hooked! I only caught it on the closing night of the show, but I was hooked and have been doing theater ever since!”

After graduating from Vineland High School, Mr. Melamed graduated from Glassboro State College and also studied theater for one semester in London.

The presentation at the Landis Theater begins with a cocktail and hors d’oeuvres reception at 6 p.m. The awards ceremony is at 7 p.m., followed by a dessert reception at 9 p.m. Entertainment consists of performances by The Ritz Theatre Company, Ocean Professional Theatre Company, and the Harmony Show Choir from the Mainstage Center for the Arts.

Tickets are $80 and can be purchased from the South Jersey Cultural Alliance, www.sjca.net.