

## **Keep the Kleenex Handy!**

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"Look at you with tears in your eyes," our Special Events Director Jenny O'Bryan just said to me. When I got in this morning, still sleepy from my middle-of-the-night viewing of the men's semifinals at the Australian Open with my double cappuccino in hand, I was told I had to "go directly to Rachel's office." After a challenging couple of days, I actually sighed, expecting to be met with an early-morning crisis.

I hung up my coat and headed down the hall to the office of our Marketing Director, Rachel Trice. And there on Rachel's red couch huddled members of our marketing team with Penny Cruz, the talented lady who runs the Rose Garden Store at Washington Park and is overseeing our Centennial merchandising program.

They didn't say a word. Penny held up something big and burgundy -- and beautiful. It was the first sample of our commemorative Pendleton blanket! Finally, after more than a year of discussion and months of design, the finished product was there in her hands. And it completely exceeded our wildest dreams!

The Rose Festival has always had a special relationship with Pendleton, both the company and the town. In 1896 Pendleton Woolen Mills became the only mill founded specifically to produce traditional Indian trade blankets. The first Pendleton blankets incorporated stripes, blocks, rectangles or crosses, and in 1901 the introduction of the Jacquard loom enabled mills to create more intricate designs. Our commemorative blanket has many of the traditional components, featuring -- of course -- a floral theme with a rose centerpiece.

So when I walked back to my office and passed Jenny, no doubt I did have tears in my eyes. Because planning and executing this important celebration is a labor of love for all of us, both staff and volunteers. And to do it right we have to engage not only our skills, but our passion as well.

This isn't the first time this week I've come face-to-face with the fruits of that passion. Just yesterday I sat in Hillsboro at the Reedville Cafe and watched the wonderful lady we've chosen to personify Georgiana Pittcock in our Living History Program in a deep discussion with Janet Wilson, a woman who probably knows more about Georgiana than any person on the planet and had agreed to generously share that knowledge with the Rose Festival. Janet has spent years researching the life and times of Mrs. Henry Pittcock, poring through historical archives, family records, personal journals and photos. During the course of her work gathering the Pittcock family genealogy, she interviewed several members of the family, including Henry Pittcock II (Georgiana's grandson) who became a close friend.

The discussion about 'Georgie' (as we fondly refer to her) and her fascinating life was so moving, many of us at the table had to blink back tears. I took out my new digital camera (which I'm still learning to use) and captured the special moment in pixels.

Just last April my sister Charlie and I celebrated my birthday weekend with a drive up the Gorge to Maryhill Museum, one of my favorite places. We decided to head back on the Washington side of the river, and ended up passing through Skamania County while the fairgrounds was featuring the traveling exhibit of the Lewis & Clark Bicentennial -- something we had already toured when it made its stop in Seaside, but something definitely worth revisiting. One of the best aspects of that exhibit was the lecture series featuring a host of national, regional and local folks representing various facets of the Lewis & Clark legend. Some of the presenters were costumed characters, recreating historic figures like Sacagawea. On that particular day, Charlie and I listened to a magical hour of memories from Meriwether Lewis' mother, portrayed by a volunteer whose warm, natural presentation had us laughing and crying in turn, while capturing the rapt attention of the kids in the audience with her fun props and homey reflections. I walked back to the car fervently wishing we had the time and resources to create our own Rose Festival living history characters as effectively as had the producers of the Lewis & Clark Bicentennial celebration.

A couple months before, Rachel had hooked me up with the amazing Angel Ocasio, an actor, director and 'physical comedian' (I hesitate to refer to him as a clown, but, in fact, he was the 2003 Clown of the Year) who worked with her on several successful projects in Bend, Oregon, including their Centennial celebration. Angel would eventually become the creative force behind our 'Vaudeville Rose,' a nod to the live theater style that launched many legendary American entertainers like W.C. Fields, the Marx Brothers and Buster Keaton.

Little did Angel know that much of his time would be spent casting, costuming, training and scheduling our three living history characters. Without Angel's help, I know we wouldn't have gotten it done. Participating in auditions for the roles last October was definitely a first for me, and it was great to be sitting with a professional who understood what the potential performers were going through. The final audition we held was for Georgiana Pittock, and the performance was so heartfelt and genuine that both Angel and I were misty-eyed. We knew we had found our Georgie, someone who cared as much as we did about capturing the essence of the iconic Mrs. Pittock.

And yesterday when I saw the approval of our choice in Janet Wilson's eyes, it dawned on me that somehow -- through effort and energy and a little luck -- we had managed to do something that just last April was a distant dream.

Uh oh. Time to stop and reach for a tissue.