

Success Network Voice Over Fair

By Cindy Newell

Auditions. They are likely one of the most stressful, anxiety-inducing elements in the life of any performer. One local voice acting coach offers her students some much-appreciated relief from the pressure of auditioning by hosting an annual audition event where they all get to audition together in a supportive and fun environment.

"It was so gratifying to see everyone having a great time and making connections, to see the dream I had so many years ago blossom into a vibrant community," said founder Wren Ross at the close of her fifth annual Voice Over Job Fair in May.

Wren, a veteran singer, actress and acting coach, sponsors the event as a low-stress means for her students to audition with top area producers in a fun and friendly atmosphere. "It's like a big casting party," said Wren. "It's very jovial, not like your typical audition where you might feel very nervous." The air at this year's fair was alive with conversation and laughter, energy and anticipation, as nearly thirty of Wren's students sat for 5-7 minute auditions, over the course of four hours, with fifteen local producers in what participants fondly refer to as "audition speed dating."

How did this all come about? Wren has been coaching voice actors and producing their demos for twenty years. In the beginning, when a student's demo was completed, she would think, "Alright, now they're going to go off into the world and I hope they get work." A number of years later she had the idea to create a group for her ever-increasing number of students and alumni to nurture them and their talent, give them additional tools and support so they could go out and actually get work. "I don't want to just make their demos and then leave them at the altar and say, well, that's very nice, and goodbye!"

So the idea for Wren's Success Network was born and took shape over a number of years. The Success Network now meets every six to eight weeks and features a speaker or panel of speakers from across the diverse breadth of the industry - social media experts, branding experts, producers of documentaries, podcasts, animation, children's content, home studio consultants, voice talent who have experienced success in various genres.



Claire Taylor, Wren Ross, Steve McGarry, Holly Miller and Chris Vallancourt. Wren with four of her students. Photo by Jess Garrett.

The success of the Success Network led organically into the birth of the Voice Over Job Fair. "At the first Job Fair, we had five producers. We all had so much fun, I decided to make it an annual event," said Wren. "The second year we had seven producers, then ten. Last year there were fifteen, and fifteen again this year. Many people have gotten work from their auditions at the Fair. WBUR cast one of our members as on-air talent from the Job Fair."

The Fair is also popular with the producers who attend. Many of them have been speakers at Success Network meetings. Producer Roy Doolittle commented, "One thing that stands out is that the people who have studied acting do a much better job. They take direction, they understand dynamics and breaking down the script. And they are confident." Both Roger Lyons, of Many Hats Productions, and John Doan, of Be-Ann Productions, said they met actors they liked as prospects for future projects. Julie Arvedon Knowlton of Slate Casting told Wren, "I always love meeting your students. They do wonderful auditions and are so professional." Two years ago, Julie and her business partner, Ashley Skomurski, chose to announce the launch of Slate Casting at the Job Fair.

"Producers get to tap a great resource of talent," said Wren, "and have an opportunity to network with each other. Some wonderful connections have been made. We also have vendors like Parsons Audio, and this year,

personal stylist Lisa Ann Schraffa Santin, podcast producer Dan Thibeault, and Carol Patton of IMAGINE News. So it's a multi-faceted networking event."

And what do Wren's students have to say? A lot! Claire Taylor said, "This year I got coaching to 'go big' and was encouraged to cultivate the friendliness in my voice so I can call on it readily." Neil Goldberg was a mere six days into his voice over journey at the time of the Job Fair. He received valuable commentary on his delivery and recommendations on where to focus. "At Wren's suggestion, I made this also about building a community - and I'm already benefitting from that part," Neil said.

"Being a first-timer at the Fair, I didn't know what to expect," said Valerie Smith. "Getting exposure and feedback on auditions and advice on auditioning from different producers and genres was pretty great. I don't believe this type of event exists in many places." Veteran actor and voice actor John Haag said Wren's Job Fair is "the only time I can remember, in all the years I've been auditioning, that I actually have fun. At the Fair, I let my preparation go and schmooze away. The result: I arrive at the table relaxed, energized, and ready to play!"

Chuck Holleman, who has gotten additional auditions from the Fair, said, "It's a relatively less stressful environment to meet folks and practice your auditioning skills." "The first thing that always strikes me," said Holly Miller, "is the uplifting environment that is evident the second you walk in the room. The atmosphere is one of encouragement, not competition." Jess Garrett agreed, calling it a "warm and lovely time to be together."

As for Wren, she says there are two icings on the Job Fair cake. "The first is to see how much fun everyone is having," she said, "and how relaxed they are. And then the REAL icing is when people get jobs and I get good feedback from producers about how well our Success Network people worked out for them."

For more information visit www.wrenross.com.

Cindy Newell is a voice over student studying with Wren Ross. This is her second article for IMAGINE.