



Cactus Needles

Monthly Newsletter of the
Southwest Costumers Guild

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"I believe that if seventeen year olds show up at your door, trick-or-treating in their street clothes, it should be legal to give them Ex-Lax chocolates." – Jeff Foxworthy

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Please send corrections by e-mail or mail to the editor.

Calendar

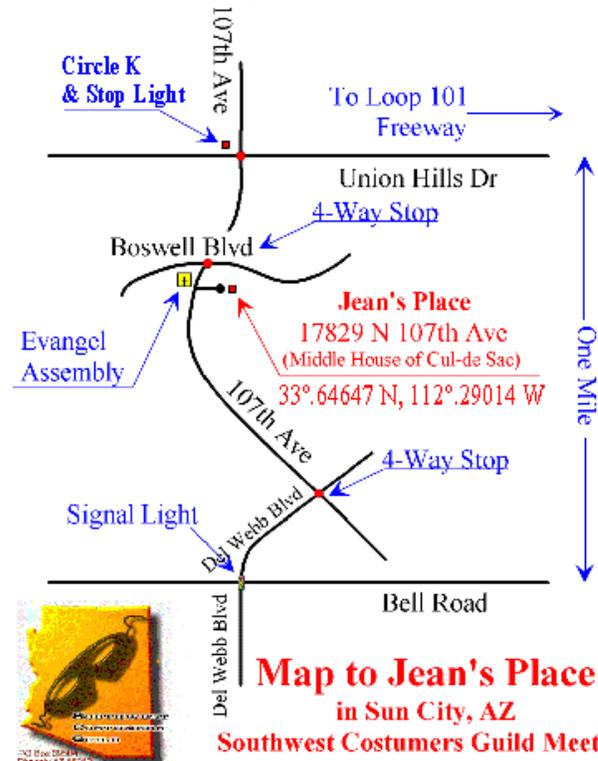
*Indicates an event organized by SWCG. Unless otherwise noted, SWCG meetings begin at 1:00 PM.

October 15-17, 2004 - **Helldorado Days** in Tombstone, Arizona. What started out as the town's 50th anniversary celebration in 1929 has turned into its oldest tradition. Activities include reenactments, a parade, fashion shows, a

carnival, live music, street entertainment, food to suit every taste, and a beard contest.

www.tombstone.org/events/helldorado.html

October 24, 2004, 10 AM – **The Cloaking*** SWCG workshop at Jean's place. We'll build some capes and other items to sell at Devonshire as our annual fundraiser. Bring your sewing tools. This is a good chance to learn a basic half-circle cape pattern.



Map to Jean's Place
in Sun City, AZ
Southwest Costumers Guild Meeting

November 5-7, 2004 – **TusCon 31** at the InnSuites Hotel, 475 N Granada Ave, Tucson. GOHs include Barbara Hambly, Willkima K. Hartmann, and Carol DePriest. <http://home.earthlink.net/~basfa/>

November 20 & 21, 2004 – **Devonshire Renaissance Faire** at Los Olivos Park in Phoenix, Arizona. www.devonshirefaire.com

November 28, 2004 – **Bustle Off to Sedona*** SWCG workshop and potluck at Frances' place in Sedona. Bring food to share. Bustle material list to be posted later.

Saturday, December 18, 2004, 5 PM – **Dickens Walk*** SWCG social at Edouard's place. Assemble in Victorian or other winter costume, then walk the *Christmas at First* festival together.

January 30, 2005 – **Duct Tape Mannequins*** SWCG workshop at Jean's place. Build a custom dresser dummy around your body using the handyman's secret weapon.

Calendar Continues on Page 3.



Images from the Coppercon 24 Masquerade
 Photos by Randall Whitlock

Top: The whole cast comes onstage for awards.
 Below: Ana's Best In Show ball gown from "Labyrinth"

Thanks Edouard for a successful masquerade!

The Costume Closet:
Some Thoughts on Stage Costumes
 by Randall Whitlock

I began the Costume Closet column in *Connotations* two years ago with a discussion of "Hall Costumes," which are those worn by con-goers to any and all convention events for their own fun and amusement. The reciprocal of the hall costume is the "Stage Costume." Stage costumes are worn for presentation at a convention masquerade.

What is a Masquerade?

To the SF convention culture, the masquerade is a costume competition, usually held on Saturday evening of a convention, on a stage in the hotel ballroom. The stage is surrounded on one or more sides by the audience. The layout is not unlike a fashion show. Competitors enter the stage, show their costume, and exit. The presentations are introduced by a master of ceremonies and accompanied by as much technical support as the convention can provide, which may include music and lighting effects. The costume presentations are rated by a panel of judges, with the best in various categories awarded ribbons or other prizes. At smaller cons, the masquerade may be combined with a dance or other evening events. At the largest cons, the masquerade can last all evening.

The 20-Foot Rule

A stage costume will be seen by a seated audience at some distance. Few, if any, of them will be close enough to see the fine details of your costume. To make a good impression, your costume should have bolder, broader lines and features than most hall costumes. This is called the "20-foot rule." Anything that can't be seen clearly from 20 feet will not register with the audience. The bigger the masquerade, the more this rule of thumb applies. For a huge masquerade, like Worldcon, your whole body may not be big enough. Many presentations at giant masquerades compensate by making the costume outlines broader and taller with wings or other features. Other presentations include many persons performing together. Lots of motion in your presentation can help to fill a large stage.

Just because your first audience will not see the details is not a reason to skimp on them. Most masquerades give awards for workmanship. You'll have your chance to show fine features of your costume to the judges in a close-up interview. A retired stage costume often becomes a hall costume, where your friends will see it one-on-one.

Competing Up

Once you have put all that time and effort into building a first-rate stage costume, it would be a pity to show it only once. Hence masquerade competitors follow a tradition called, "Competing Up." A successful costume that has been presented at a local convention (like Coppercon) might be shown again at a regional convention (like Westercon) and thence at a national or worldwide convention (like Worldcon), much as plays can be tried out in regional theaters before going to Broadway.

Costumes that have won awards at larger conventions are not generally entered in competition at smaller conventions. This is more a matter of sportsmanship than an actual, written rule. Costumes from large masquerades, however, are often shown out of competition (also called "For Display Only") at smaller masquerades.

Stage Presence

The most successful masquerade presentations are those where the contestants plays a character, rather than simply acts as a walking coat rack. This can be very, very subtle. You don't need a lavish sketch or dance to show your costume on the stage – a fashion show walk-across across is plenty – but the audience and judges will pick up your body language. Practice moving in your costume until it feels natural. Let the costume help you project the air of being an entirely different person!

Calendar Continued

February 27, 2004 – **Calendar Girls & Guys*** SWCG meeting at Stephanie's place. Annual calendar planning.

March 25-27, 2005 – **AniZona**: Arizona's first Anime convention at the Embassy Suites North, SEC, I-17 & Greenway in Phoenix. www.anizona.org

April 29 - May 2, 2005 – **Costume-Con 23**: Crossroads of Space and Time. A celebration of fabric, design, and performance in Ogden, Utah. Memberships are \$75 US until September 12, 2004. www.crossroadsutah.org/

May 6-8, 2005 – **LepreCon 31** at Carefree Resort, 37220 Mule Train Road, Carefree, AZ GOHs include Kevin J. Anderson, Dave Dorman, Bear Burge, and Sarah Clemens. Featuring an independent film festival and a masquerade directed by Margaret Grady. www.leprecon.org/lep31/

Old-Fashioned Halloween

The picture below was sent by my sister Laura. It was taken at a Halloween party held circa 1890 in Albia or Avery, Iowa. Check out some of the mask work! Halloweens were creepier before special effects! The man with the mustache at background right was our great-grandfather, Edwin Emmett Bates.

