



Gaining in translation

By **Dan Linehan**
 CNHI News Service

MANKATO— In the audience were deaf students and children learning sign language while onstage interpreters translated a play about the most famous deaf and blind person who ever lived.

So there was something for everyone Thursday morning as Bethany Lutheran College put on a one-time signed version of “The Miracle Worker,” a play about Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan, whose real-life miracle was teaching Keller — then a half-wild 6-year-old.

Children from area schools in American Sign Language classes whispered as they took in the unorthodox lesson while deaf and hard of hearing high schoolers sat silently, keeping one eye on the action and the other on the two interpreters sitting onstage.

Lance Gonzalez, a senior at the Minnesota State Academy for the Deaf, said through an interpreter that it was sometimes tough to keep up. But the performers were much too far away for lip reading, and Gonzalez said the signers were integral — he would have fallen asleep without them.

The idea for a translated performance began as ASL teacher Crista Browne-Krosch recognized the play in a fall schedule at Bethany. She’s a teacher with SOCRATES, also called the South Central Regional Area Telecommunications System, a consortium of 26 area districts and 34 public libraries that provides distance learning.

It provides ASL lessons, among other services, through interactive, video-delivered lessons. Browne-Krosch teaches students from New Ulm to Waseca while based in the “hub” office in North Mankato.

Long-distance teaching is required because there are so few licensed ASL teachers, said SOCRATES director Dale Carrison. There are no state programs that certify ASL teachers. Browne-Krosch has a provisional license and is the program’s sole sign language teacher.

Browne-Krosch said she thought it would be a good opportunity to expose the children to Helen Keller’s life. She also asked the school to provide interpreters.

“It’s exciting for kids to see language happening,” she said. “Most kids have very little exposure to ASL outside of classrooms.”

She then told friends in the local deaf community about the showing and got an “overwhelming response.” The Minnesota State Academy for the Deaf got that message and several dozen students — most of the school — came to the performance, said teacher Mike Sandberg.

Gonzalez said he’s acted in school performances himself and was paying special attention to the stage.

Sabra Carlin Jr., another student at the school, said she liked the acting, too — but couldn’t relate to the plight of Keller because she was both blind and deaf.

Sandberg agreed, saying blindness was a wholly different world from being deaf.

“For Sabra, and for most of our kids, deaf is nothing.”

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Photos



Sign language interpreters Tina Mowrey (left) and Pam Guerrero translated for Annie Sullivan and Anagnos, played by Crystal Lonquist and John Henry III. John Cross



Play director Peter Bloedel explained how sign language interpreters will translate “The Miracle Worker” for deaf students in the audience. John Cross