

# NORTHEAST SEATTLE LIVING

View Ridge, Sand Point, Hawthorne Hills and Inverness



## MEET CHRISTI CRUZ AND FAMILY: EDUCATING THROUGH THE ARTS



*Photo by Kim Hildebrand*

## MEET CHRISTI CRUZ AND FAMILY:

### EDUCATING THROUGH THE ARTS

By Alyssa Campbell

Christi Cruz is an actor in action. Standing in View Ridge Park on a hazy summer afternoon, kids come running up to her to get a hug and a smile from the teacher they know and love. But it's summer and school's out, so the education Christi and her team are giving kids in the park is one that builds confidence and creates community among these young people through dramatic arts and theater. Christi is the founder and director of Wedgwood Drama Studio and she has been teaching Wedgwood Drama Camps in View Ridge Park since 2008 when she and her brother decided to transform their shared passion for theater into a business that has brought the benefits of dramatic arts education programming to the kids in Northeast Seattle. But it was never really her intention to start a business and the now-thriving drama studio and camp programs came about very organically to fill a need in our community. "We started this whole thing because Wedgwood Elementary wanted to create a theater program in the school and I knew I could help with that," Christi says. The success of this theater program and Christi's experience working with young children as a preschool teacher led to more opportunities to bring theater to other schools. So, Wedgwood Drama Studio was born. "It seemed really scary and daunting to start a business," she remembers. "I thought to myself, 'I don't know how to do this.'"

But she figured it out with the help of her friends and colleagues in the arts world, many of whom are still working with her today. Christi credits word of mouth and strong community ties to the growth and success of her business which offers a variety of classes and camps. Wedgwood Drama Studio has a simple but powerful mission: to provide quality dramatic arts education programming for young people of all skill level and ability in the Seattle area. And Christi and her team of teaching artists believe a safe and supportive environment to practice the skills drama engages is vital to a young person's growth and education in the



classroom and beyond. "I think the kids that are naturally very drawn to theater will find their way," she says. "It's the kids that aren't so sure that I really love teaching and exposing to this art." Watching kids find their confidence through storytelling is what makes her career so rewarding. Time and time again, Christi has

seen an unsure child blossom and grow through theater. She teaches children that the world is a stage that we live on and we're all just telling our own stories in different ways. "It's magical to see the transformation and progression," Christi smiles as she says. Clearly, her approach is resonating with parents and kids.



Wedgwood Drama Studio has won two awards in Parent-Map magazine where readers vote on their favorite places to play and learn in the Puget Sound area.

Christi's skills as an actor and teacher create the perfect combination for her to work and thrive in Northeast Seattle. She received her BA from the University of Washington in Drama and Spanish and has been working since 1998 as a professional actor in the Seattle area performing on stage, film, videos, commercials, and in voice-overs. She's

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also currently working on a web series. And when she's not doing all that, she's working with kids as a preschool teacher at University Ravenna Cooperative Preschool. The benefits of her profession are mutual for Christi and the kids she teaches. As she puts it, "Sometimes I feel like I am creative and sometimes I need to be around other creative people to suck up all that good energy. I enjoy working with kids because they don't have the same filters as adults. They are so honest and I appreciate that." She met her husband, Wilfredo, when she was in college at the UW and they both worked at Azteca restaurant in the University Village shopping center. She muses that it was a very different U-Village back then. Defi-

nately a people person, Christi loved working in the restaurant business because of how many great people she would meet. "I will totally judge you on how you treat your server," she laughs.

Christi and Wilfredo, a phlebotomist and x-ray technician, have three children who attend three different neighborhood schools. Diego, 16,



Winnie-dog, Lucas, Diego, Christi and Cecilia.

goes to Roosevelt High School and, like his mom, is involved in theater and making films. He's also in a band and is a talented visual artist. Lucas, 12, attends Eckstein Middle School and plays football, soccer, and baseball. Cecilia, 9, is also into theater, music, and dance. Cecilia attends Wedgwood Elementary where Christi helped to create the school's robust theater program years ago. The other member of the creative Cruz family is their dog Winnie who has turned Christi into a self-admitted, 'giant dog lady.' And not even like a normal dog lady, according to Christi, "I'm the lady who talks to her dog in a different voice and I feel like now I understand why people want to clone their dogs." The Cruz family, whose motto, laughs Christi, is 'Get in the Car,' loves living in Northeast Seattle and hopes to be living in

the neighborhood for many years to come. Christi was a military child who moved around a lot and she feels happy to have found such a supportive community to call home for her family and her business. "People are nice. They care. They say hello."

Being nice and caring is at the heart of what Christi teaches

all her performers at Wedgwood Drama Studio. And Christi feels very fortunate to live in a community where there are so many opportunities for young people to experience the arts and she loves seeing kids getting involved. "It's magic," she says. "We know, when young people are encouraged to take risks, try new things, and stretch their growing wings in a supportive environment, they gain experiences they can carry with them as they take their next leaps in life." Christi herself was inspired at a young age by a theater group that performed at her school. She remembers seeing the diverse group of talented actors and feeling the confidence that she, too, could be a part of that world. She was struck by the discipline it took to run a production and how everyone involved has to rely on each other like family to make it all work. These are still the important things to Christi, the Cruz family, and the Wedgwood Drama Studio team.

Learn more about programs offered at Wedgwood Drama Studio at [WedgwoodDrama.com](http://WedgwoodDrama.com).

**Please contact us if you are interested in being a family feature or if you would like to nominate a neighbor. We love to hear your ideas and get your submissions. Please email Alyssa at [alyssacampbell@bestversionmedia.com](mailto:alyssacampbell@bestversionmedia.com).**



Christi's family from left to right is Diego (16), husband Wilfredo, Lucas (12) and Cecilia (9).



## POP QUIZ!

**If you were a color you would be:** Red

**Secret talent:** I can cross one eye

**Pet peeve:** People who say 'yep' instead of 'you are welcome'

**Favorite cocktail:** La Croix

**Ideal Sunday afternoon:** In a lake

**Best kept secret in NE Seattle:** I don't think there are any secrets in NE Seattle