



Armando Alvarez, performing in drag as Janae Degravano, with Auxy Cortez during a performance May 17 at Cortez's bachelorette party.

MAMTA POPAT / ARIZONA DAILY STAR

ALVAREZ

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without enough to eat, that's he's lived through summers without cooling and winters without heat.

Alvarez is one of 19 graduating seniors at his high school — and one of 44 in the Sunnyside district overall — who were, or are currently, considered homeless.

For a while, to support himself, Alvarez worked through the night cleaning hotel rooms and then attended school by day.

"I'm glad I went through it," he said. "It's taught me how to be stronger."

Extreme poverty is the most common underlying factor faced by the youths Araceli Mendoza helps in her job as a liaison for homeless Sunnyside students.

In Alvarez's case, it was his guidance counselor, Patricia Garcia, who first referred him to Mendoza and then to Youth on Their Own, a local nonprofit that helps homeless students finish school.

This year, about 240 homeless teens are expected to graduate.

"All of our Youth on Their Own students are so appreciative and humble and true survivors of their situations," said Garcia, who met Alvarez about four

years ago. She's pushed him to stay focused and graduate because, she's told him, a rewarding life awaits.

"He's tenacious. He's very talented and creative," she said. "He has the ability to seek out opportunities for himself and to market his talents."

Alvarez and his mother, Teresa, are getting close again, despite a complicated family history and some disagreements about what happened during his early teens.

She says the problems were rooted in her son clashing with his stepfather, while Alvarez says he was rejected and left largely to fend for himself. His mother says she tried to provide for him by finding him a trailer to live in, while Alvarez says he felt abandoned.

Mendoza said she has worked with several teens who became homeless because their parents didn't approve of a pregnancy or of their sexual orientation or of their being transgender.

Other times, teens are alone because a parent or parents have been deported or are incarcerated.

"A lot of people aren't aware that homeless students exist," she said.

"We do have students who are in class, going to school every day, who are facing those challenges at

home."

Garcia and others helped Alvarez get food and services. They found him a space heater for the cold nights. A classmate's mother, Monique Coronado, rushed over one night when she heard the trailer's wiring had started shooting sparks, Alvarez said. Youth on Their Own installed a new water heater.

"They have all done so much for me," he said.

Last year, Alvarez headed the decorating committee for Youth on Their Own's graduation ceremonies. The theme was superheroes, and CEO Nicola Hartmann said his work was amazing.

"He's super-talented," she said, adding that his generous spirit is inspiring. "And even when he was struggling to get by, he was already talking about giving back."

Alejandrina Gallardo, a Spanish teacher at Sunnyside High School, said Alvarez used to hang out in her room during his free periods. They talked about his life, and schemed how he could make things better.

"We were all trying to help him in the best ways we could," she said. "He's a great, great kid."

Contact reporter Patty Machelor at pmachelor@tucson.com or 806-7754. On Twitter: @pattymachstar

ATC

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An anticipated operating surplus for the 2017-18 fiscal year, which ends in June, is expected to cut the deficit by an additional \$250,000, Russo said. And with a recent Stonewall Foundation matching grant, the pay-down could go more quickly.

Russo is planning for the same surplus in the future.

"If we have an operating surplus of \$250,000 for the next four years, we would wipe out that accumulated deficit and we would be back at a very cash-strong position. At that point, any surplus we had would go into a surplus fund, or capital improvements — things like that that we haven't been able to do."

There is reason to believe ATC can do that.

In the last two years, the company has increased:

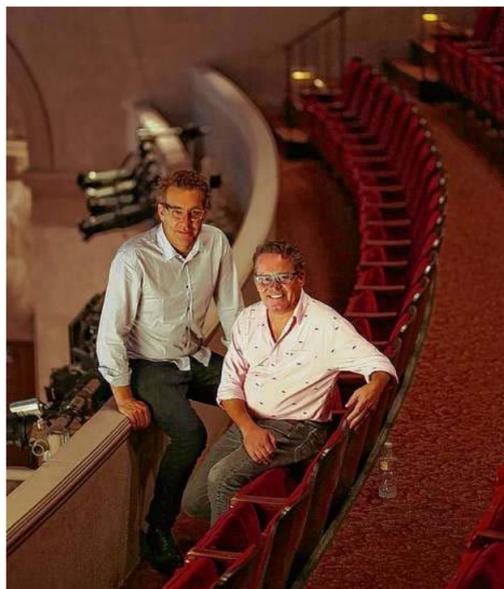
- Contributed income by 18 percent.
- The subscriber base by about 20 percent.
- Single sales by 50 percent.
- The company's earned income to a projected \$4.5 million this season — that's an increase of close to \$1 million over two years ago.

Russo thinks that some of those successes are a result of directing more resources into the productions, which is why the budget for the last two fiscal years was about \$7.5 million, an increase of close to \$1 million over the 2015-16 budget. The 2018-19 budget is \$7.9 million.

"When you are at a financial crossroads, the best way to recover is to prioritize and put as much of your resources into the main mission-driven activities," said Russo. "Those are our shows. You have to spend more money in order to right the ship."

The goal now is to increase the donor base and secure more grants so that the deficit can go away and the theater company has a cushion that will allow it to realize its bigger visions.

"But we need major donors again who will say



Arizona Theatre Company's artistic director, David Ivers, left, and the company's managing director, Bill Russo.

TIM FULLER

STONEWALL FOUNDATION MATCHING GRANT

The Tucson-based Stonewall Foundation has been giving about \$30,000 a year to the Arizona Theatre Company for decades.

But this year, it upped its contribution with a \$200,000 matching grant.

The grant is just the shot in the arm that the theater needs, said Billy Russo, ATC's managing director.

"The foundation stepped up and said, 'We are going to make this increased gift toward properly capitalizing the theater. Now is the time to invest.' They wanted it to be the beginning of spurring others to jump on board."

The grant is a vote of confidence that the company has made great strides in improving its finances while maintaining quality. It says that Stonewall thinks ATC is here to stay.

"Arizona Theatre Company's new leadership has shown us that the new artistic vision and commitment to ambition and fiscal responsibility has

inspired and energized its audiences," Stonewall Foundation President and CEO Rick Small said in a news release.

"Our hope is to engage communities and individuals across Arizona in ensuring a bright, successful future for Arizona Theatre Company to build upon its legacy with confidence, curiosity and excellence."

In an effort to maintain donors and bring in new ones, Stonewall has put a caveat on the grant: 50 percent of the matching funds have no restrictions, the other 50 percent must come from new donors, donors who have not made a gift in the past 18 months, or donors who increase the amount they give.

To make a matching donation, contact Julia Waterfall-Kanter, ATC's director of development, at jwkanter@aztc.org or call 884-8210, Ext. 7301. Donations can also be made through the company's website: arizonatheatre.org/support-atc/ways-to-give

"let's capitalize the theater so that the new vision can take hold," said Russo.

"That way, we can continue what we achieved just in terms of renewing excitement, engagement

with the audiences and the sense that there's a vitality in the theater."

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