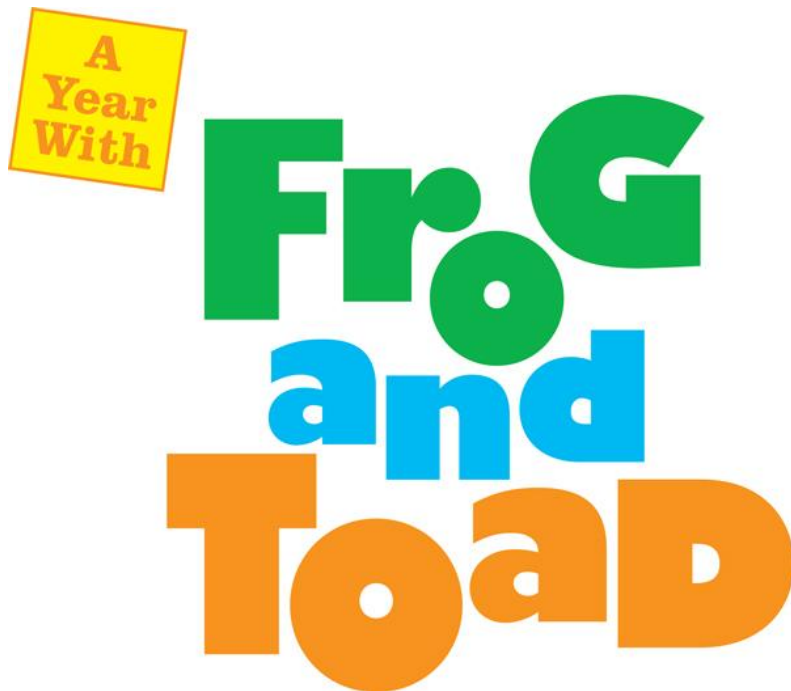


Real Strategic Public Relations Campaign
Albert Lea High School



Grace Chalmers
2022

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Introduction

Every fall, the Albert Lea High School theater department performs a musical, while each spring, they perform a play. The musicals are very well-received and very successful in the community, however, the plays do not receive the same level of attention. Diane Heaney, long-time choir and show choir director at the high school, has directed the musicals for over 15 years. As she is nearing retirement, she elected to have the theater department perform a musical in the spring of 2022, instead of a play, and in addition to the regularly scheduled musical that was performed in the fall of 2021. This is the first time in ALHS history that a musical has been performed instead of a play in the spring of the academic year. The chosen musical is *A Year with Frog and Toad*, based off of the children's books by Arnold Lobel.

As this is a new affair for the high school, anticipated reception of a spring musical is unknown. I volunteered my services to launch a public relations campaign to help ensure the spring musical has the same level of community reception as previous fall musicals. I worked with Diane Heaney, as well as the public relations coordinator of the school district, Brittany Voigt, and Patty Greibok of the Albert Lea Public Library to raise public awareness of the musical and generate anticipation and attendance.

Research

I began by looking at ticket sales, performance dates, and popularity records of previous musicals performed by the high school. Almost immediately, we hit a roadblock, as only ticket sales from the fall of 2021 were saved on record. However, looking at performance dates, all previous fall musicals have been performed on the Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights of the second week of November, with performances always at 7pm. Looking at the most recent

performances, the high school performed *Mamma Mia* in 2021, *Freaky Friday* in 2019, *The Addams Family* in 2018, *The Little Mermaid* in 2017, *Grease* in 2016, *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* in 2015, and *Into the Woods* in 2014. Notably, there was no musical performed in 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although ticket sale records of those past shows are unavailable, Mrs. Heaney has stated that the most popular shows were *Mamma Mia*, *The Little Mermaid*, and *Grease*, while some of the lesser-known musicals, like *Freaky Friday* and *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* garnered smaller audiences. Mrs. Heaney has maintained that shows that are more prevalent in pop culture tend to draw larger crowds, although attendance and sales are very similar on a year-to-year basis. Based on this information, I concluded that some of the success of fall musicals was due to the consistency of show dates and the popularity of certain musicals.

With this in mind, I began my research on the show itself. *A Year with Frog and Toad* is a musical adaptation of the beloved children's book series, *Frog and Toad* by Arnold Lobel. It follows Frog and Toad on their adventures throughout the course of a year, as the name implies. The show is directed towards a young audience, including children. Its premiere on Broadway in 2003 introduced professional children's theater to Broadway. With only 5 principle characters, the musical is easily put on by smaller casts, making it a popular show for community theaters across the United States. In addition, the music style is primarily jazz, which is in sharp contrast to the iconic showtune-type style of classic musicals and harsh pop style of modern musicals. Appealing to children makes it a unique show, which I decided to use to my advantage throughout my campaign.

I had never heard of *A Year with Frog and Toad* before, so the next thing I did was simply ask people in Albert Lea if they had heard of it. I primarily asked people and teachers at the high

school, and every person I asked said no, they had not heard of it. I concluded that it was not a popular musical, especially compared to previous popular musicals like *Mamma Mia* and *The Little Mermaid*. This told me I would need to raise a lot of awareness, not only about the upcoming performances but also about what the show would be about.

I then checked out a copy of *Frog and Toad are Friends* from the Albert Lea Public Library so I could get a sense of what the show would be about. The chapters in the book are simply short stories about Frog and Toad, just like the musical. Being at the library gave me the idea to host a public event at the library for kids to attend, where we could do a reading from *Frog and Toad are Friends* and make crafts, and where I could promote the musical to the primary audience.

Firstly, however, I needed to solidify performance dates with Mrs. Heaney. The weekend she wanted to schedule performances happens to be the same weekend as the high school's prom, which created a problem: many of the cast members would be unavailable for the typical Saturday night performance. However, we decided to use this to our advantage. We realized that many parents of young children might be less inclined to see the show if it was performed in the evening, since kids tend to go to bed early or get cranky at night. We settled on having a 7pm performance on Friday, May 6, a Saturday morning performance at 10am on May 7, and a Sunday matinee performance at 2pm on May 8. This way, students in the cast would be able to attend prom on Saturday night, and parents would be able to take their children to an earlier performance on the weekend, when more people are available and kids are wide awake. However, this did create some uncertainty, because, like I said before, we believe some of the success of the fall musicals can be attributed to consistency regarding performance dates and times. However, due to the unique nature of this musical and the fact that it is the first spring

musical in ALHS history, we were willing to take the chance and alter the typical performance days.

After solidifying the performance dates and times, I concluded that my research was finished and I could move on to planning objectives and setting goals.

Research Analysis

I am pleased with my research. I did a lot of looking into the project and thought about how I could spread awareness of the musical throughout the Albert Lea community. I would have liked to have seen more ticket sales and accurate attendance numbers from past performances for comparison, but since I won't be able to analyze the ticket sales/audience attendance before the semester ends, it's not crucial, because I won't be able to compare them. I think the research really helped me figure out what information I knew and what I would need to do, regarding objectives and programming.

Objectives

My biggest goal was to have as close of an equal reception as possible to the fall musicals. Like I said, the musicals have always been much more well-received than the spring plays. Earlier, I attributed that to the consistency of the performance dates and the popularity of the show, but I would like to add that I also think people prefer seeing musicals over plays. In addition, musicals have larger casts, so more family members come out to see the show. However, *A Year with Frog and Toad* has a small cast, so I really wanted to do my best to bring a large crowd out to see the show.

A big part of making that goal happens falls under the category of Informational Objectives:

- Inform the student body about the upcoming musical
- Inform friends and family of high schoolers about the upcoming musical
- Inform the community about the upcoming musical

If I wanted people to show up and attend the musical, I had to make sure they knew about it!

First, I needed to make sure the students knew the theater department was going to be putting on a musical instead of a play. I also wanted to communicate to the immediate audience, friends and families of high schoolers, who are interested in high school events and would be most likely to attend performances. Finally, due to the nature of the show being aimed at kids and being family-friendly, I wanted to inform the larger community, to draw in more people who might not typically attend the high school musical productions.

Attitudinal Objectives also played a large part:

- Generate excitement in the student body
- Create anticipation in the community

I anticipated that a challenging aspect would be to generate excitement in the student body. As the show is more kid-centered than previous shows, I was worried about how the high schoolers would react, so I made it a goal of mine to stir up enthusiasm within the student body. I also wanted the community to be excited so they would want to come see the show.

Behavioral Objectives were pretty straightforward:

- Get people to attend my public event
- Get people to attend the show

The theater department doesn't put on shows to make money, they put on shows for the students to have fun and for the community to attend, so getting people to attend shows is simply to have a good turn out and show off the hard work of the students.

All of those smaller objectives lead towards my biggest objective: getting people to attend the performance.

Objectives Analysis

The most difficult objectives were the Behavioral Objectives, and that is mostly because I'm unable to measure those until the actual performances. I am most pleased with my Informational Objectives, because they were straightforward and logical: if I want people to come to the show, I need to *inform* them. It was simple to decide that not only did I want high schoolers to come to the show, but I wanted the community to attend as well, as they have done in the past. The Informational Objectives made a lot of sense for this campaign. The Attitudinal Objectives could have used some improvement, I think. I not only wanted people to come to the show, but I wanted them to be excited about it as well. When it comes to theater, the mood of an audience has the power to change the entire vibe of the show, both on the stage and in the crowd. I wanted people to be excited to come to the show and bring that excitement with them. My critique of the Attitudinal Objectives is that they seem a little bit vague. I could have expanded on *how* I wanted to generate excitement, which could have also tied into my Behavioral Objectives.

Programming

The first thing I needed to do was meet the informational objectives and spread the word about the musical. I started with the student body. I created audition posters to advertise auditions in the high school, and the day Mrs. Heaney announced the musical, my posters went up around the school (**Appendix A**). This way, students could become aware of the show. I also advertised auditions for 2 weeks on 5 Minute Paws, the daily school newscast that all classes watch, using information given to me by Mrs. Heaney (**Appendix B**). Again, this ensured I could reach the entire student body and make sure they knew that the production would be happening and that they would have ample time to schedule an audition and figure out their schedule.

Although I wanted to immediately make the public aware of the show, I had to wait for Mrs. Heaney to decide on the dates of performances, because as I said, prom was scheduled for when she wanted to perform the show. Once she had decided on official dates, I created posters that could be printed and mass distributed. I used the official *A Year with Frog and Toad* logo from a logo pack that Mrs. Heaney purchased from Music Theatre International, so the show and its promotional pieces could be used and advertised without copyright or legal issues. These posters went up not only in the high school, but in the 5 local elementary schools as well (**Appendix C**). Because the target audience is children, we wanted to directly reach them in their schools. We also sent some posters to local daycare centers.

And to reach a wider audience, I contacted Brittany Voigt, the public relations coordinator for the school district, and she uploaded my poster to the ALHS Facebook page (**Appendix D**). This way, people who wouldn't be going into schools and seeing posters could still learn about the show on social media. I also reached out to the local radio station, KATE Radio, and worked with their content director, Mike Woitus, to air advertisements in the weeks

leading up to the show. Finally, I contacted the *Albert Lea Tribune*, and worked with Renee Citsay to place advertisements in the local newspaper. These efforts helped me reach more people in the community, outside of those immediately involved with the high school.

With my advertising to the student body and general public, I considered my informational objectives fulfilled and switched to looking to attitudinal objectives.

To generate excitement among the student body, I once again used 5 Minute Paws (**Appendix E**). I made sure to say when the show was and how much ticket prices were, and encouraged students to attend the show and support their friends and the theater department. The same announcement was read for 2 weeks leading up to the show, so once again, there was ample time for students (and staff) to purchase tickets to the show or make plans to go.

The biggest way I planned to generate excitement among the community was through a public event. I reached out to Patty Greibrok, the children's librarian at the Albert Lea Public Library, and coordinated an event to promote the musical. Once a month, the children's library hosts an event called "Family Fun" for children and their families to attend. These events include storytime, crafts, and games for children. According to past library event records, anywhere from 0 to 30 people show up for events. To hopefully draw more people to the event, we used posters and radio ads, as well as posted on the library's website (**Appendix F**). We had a total of 25 parents and children attend the event, so I deemed that a success (**Appendix G**).

The event included teaching children about the differences between frogs and toads, showing pictures of frogs and toads, and actually reading short stories from the original Frog and Toad books by Arnold Lobel. After storytime, we played games with the kids, where they pretended to be frogs and hopped around. After that, I gave a quick informational speech about the show, directed at both the kids and parents. I asked the kids if they liked learning about frogs

and toads, and if they would want to see it performed on a stage, and they seemed excited. I used that opportunity to then tell the parents about when the performances would be. I highlighted the fact that we had shows on the weekend and at early times, so they would be able to bring their children to see the show. At the end, we sent them home with crafts related to frogs, and each child received a copy of *Frog and Toad are Friends*. I also handed out small flyers (small versions of my poster) to all of the families that attended, that stated all of the information I had already shared with them (**Appendix C**). The event lasted 45 minutes. I was unsure how long the kids would be able to focus on frogs and toads, but the energy was high the whole time and the kids seemed to be having fun. This was the biggest event I did to help generate public interest, one of my attitudinal objectives.

Programming Analysis

I think my programming worked really well for this specific campaign. For past musicals, all that's been done is one standard poster, a post on the ALHS social media, and an article in the newspaper. I am pleased with my initiative to engage the student body through audition posters and school-wide announcements. I am most proud of my event at the public library because it was a way to communicate directly with the target audience, it fit the theme of the show very well, and it was a success. Being able to talk to the target audience was helpful for my attitudinal objectives because I could learn about attitudes towards the show, straight from the source, so I'm very happy with my event.

One thing I didn't do (that I originally planned to do) was write a news release for the *Albert Lea Tribune*, the local newspaper. Mrs. Heaney instructed me not to write one because a journalist for the *Tribune*, Sarah Stultz, has a long history of writing the news articles each time

the high school puts on a musical or play, so we left that to her. She will be writing an article during tech week of the show, which starts on May 1, 2022. What's most important for me is that there will be an article in the newspaper, so since that will be happening, I'm happy.

Something I would have liked to have done that we weren't able to do would have been to tour the elementary schools with a part of the cast. When I was in elementary school, it was a tradition for the high school jazz band to tour the elementary schools, perform, and answer questions. It inspired me and many others to learn music and participate in band. Using this logic, I wanted to have the cast tour the schools to hype up the show and encourage younger kids to come to the show. However, Mrs. Heaney thought it would be too late in the school year for high school kids to be missing class, especially with AP and ACT testing season approaching, so we weren't able to do that. However, this could certainly be something the high school looks to do for fall musicals to increase the engagement even more so.

Evaluation

Regarding Informational and Attitudinal Objectives, I believe I was able to meet them all. I am very proud of my efforts to inform the students, friends and family, and the community, which included a public event, social media posts, posters, and more (explained in Programming). I am pleased with the reception among the student body. Auditions were very successful, which showed a lot of interested students, so I am counting on students who didn't get a part in the show to attend performances and bring their friends with them. My sister is a senior at the high school and my dad is a teacher and they have told me that as the performance dates are getting closer, they are hearing more people talk about the show, which tells me my advertising methods are working and my Informational Objectives are being met. I also received a lot of positive feedback (word-of-mouth) after my public event, so I believe I was able to

engage the community and encourage them to attend the upcoming performances. Although I will not be able to measure the number of people attending the show (Behavioral Objectives), I had a good turn out for my public event. The objective was to get people to attend, and like I mentioned earlier, anywhere from 0 to 30 people typically show up for library events, so with a total of 25 attendees, I called it a success.

Evaluation Analysis

I would have liked to have come up with a more concrete way to measure the objectives. Word-of-mouth is where I got all of my results regarding Attitudinal Objectives, but that might not be the most accurate way of measuring the attitudes of people. I considered having people fill out a survey after my public event, describing their levels of enthusiasm for both the event and for the show, but I decided to simply stick with word-of-mouth reviews. Having people fill out a survey might have given me more concrete numbers (although, I was also trying to consider how many of the parents would actually want to take the time to fill out a survey, which played a part in determining not to make a survey). Also, it is hard to know how many people I have been reaching with my advertising efforts, so it's a little bit difficult to measure my Informational Objectives. Again, hearing people talk about the show is my main form of measuring my objectives, so it's hard to know how many people I've been reaching. Overall, though, going by word-of-mouth enthusiasm, I am still pleased with what I've heard around the community regarding anticipation and the pre-purchasing of tickets for the show, so I'm happy with my efforts to fulfill my objectives.

Conclusion

Looking back, I'm overall very satisfied with my campaign. I learned a lot of things along the way and had to quickly overcome my fear of emailing people I'd never met before. I got to utilize my graphic design and writing skills to make promotional pieces, and although I was nervous about publicly publishing my work, it helped me overcome my fear and apply my work to real-world situations. It was a great experience for me and also helped take a load off of Mrs. Heaney so she could focus on directing the show and not the advertising. It was fun to do a campaign for my old high school about a topic I am passionate about (musical theater).

I'll have to wait until performances begin to truly see the success of my campaign, but even so, it is feeling successful to me right now. I am pleased with my work and proud of my efforts.

Appendix

A. Audition Poster



B. 5 Minute Paws Audition Information

Audition times for the spring musical, *A Year with Frog and Toad*, are posted on the vocal music board. Sign up now for a time on March 8th, 9th, and 10th. Various times are available. Be prepared to read from the script and sing. There is no need to prepare anything ahead of time. Please know your conflicts and dates you are not available for practices. Cast will be announced Thursday, March 10th. You will need to pick up scripts from Mrs. Heaney on that date to study over spring break.

C. Official Poster/Flyer

ALHS PRESENTS

A Year With

Frog and Toad

Music by **ROBERT REALE** Book and Lyrics by **WILLIE REALE**

Based on the books by **ARNOLD LOBEL**

Originally presented on Broadway by
Bob Boyett, Adrienne Lobel, Michael Gardner,
Lawrence Horowitz, and Roy Furmah

World Premiere at The Children's Theatre Company
Minneapolis, Minnesota

FRIDAY MAY 6, 7PM
SATURDAY MAY 7, 10AM
SUNDAY MAY 8, 2PM

HIGH SCHOOL AUDITORIUM

TICKETS AVAILABLE ONLINE AT
WWW.ALHSCHOOLS.ORG/TICKETS

TICKETS ALSO AVAILABLE AT THE DOOR

\$8 ADULTS, \$6 SENIORS AND STUDENTS. NO PASSES.

A YEAR WITH FROG AND TOAD
Is presented through special arrangement with Music Theatre International
(MTI). All authorized performance materials are also supplied by MTI.
www.mtishows.com

SPRING MUSICAL

D. ALHS Facebook Post

All **Posts** People Groups Photos Video

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3m · 

www.alschools.org/tickets

ALHS PRESENTS

A Year With

Frog and Toad

Music by **ROBERT REALE** Book and Lyrics by **WILLIE REALE**
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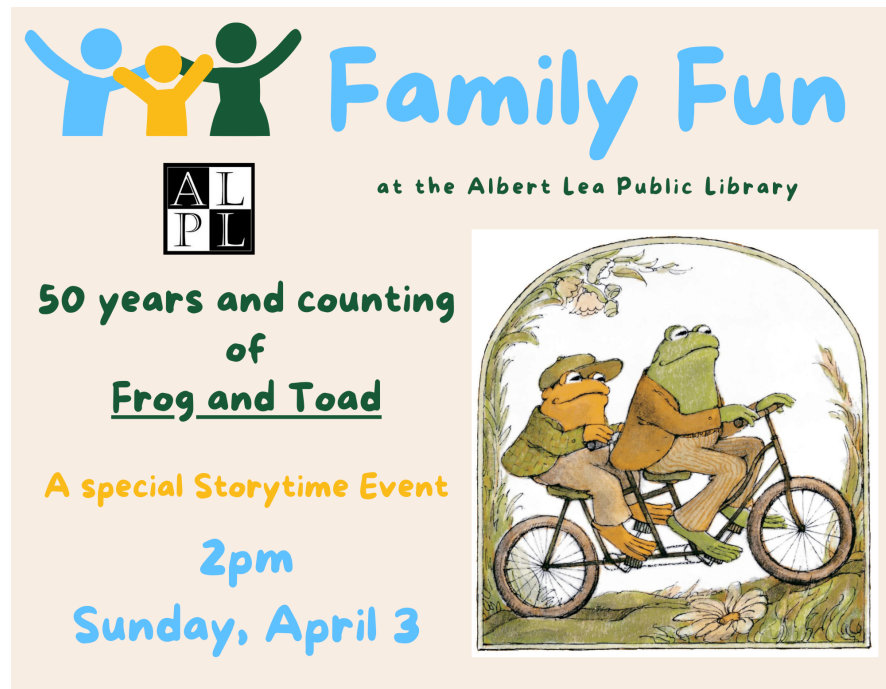
  You, Aimee Chalmers and 1 other 1 Share

 Home  1 Friends  9+ Watch  Marketplace  9+ Notifications  Menu

E. 5 Minute Paws Show Information

ALHS is preparing to perform the musical *A Year with Frog and Toad*. This show is based off of the famous children's books by Arnold Lobel, and follows the adventures of Frog and Toad over the course of a year. Performances will be held on Friday May 6th at 7pm, Saturday May 7th at 10am, and Sunday May 8th at 2pm. Tickets are available online or at the door. Student and senior tickets are \$6, and adult tickets are \$8. Come out and show your support!

F. Library Event Poster



G. Photos from the Library Event

- a. Patty and I, holding the flyers



b. Patty during storytime



c. Kids at the event

