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PRESS RELEASE

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Duende is back with “On Fire!” and a hot cast

Duende: Drama & Literature, Sonora’s wildcat theater company, brings their new play “On Fire!” to the outdoor theater in Carkeet Park in Columbia College, beginning Friday, May 16.

The four-man cast of Don Bilotti, Van Gordon, Thomas F. Maguire, and David Wagner will tell the story of fire in the American forests, from the founding of the Forest Service in 1905 to the disastrous fires of 2002.

Duende’s Artistic Director and Playwright, Rick Foster, says that “**On Fire!**” dramatizes the political wars that inadvertently led the forests to their current perilous condition. He says, “I also concentrate on the Great Fire of 1910. This was more or less the Revolutionary War for the Forest Service. They didn’t exactly defeat the fire, but their acts created heroic stories that solidified their myth and moved public opinion to underwrite their vision of fire suppression. We try to give a picture of just how epic and chaotic and terrifying and frivolous and tragic a great fire can be. Given the fuel conditions in our forests nearly a century later, we seem certain to be on a collision course for such fires again.”

Bilotti, Gordon, Maguire, and Wagner, who delighted audiences last summer in Duende’s gold-rush comedy “Wicked Dick Three Eyes,” will play a multitude of roles – from presidents Teddy Roosevelt and William Howard Taft to Gifford Pinchot, the legendary founder of the Forest Service, to crews of fire-fighters, to hecklers, to newsboys and cleaning ladies.

Foster floated the idea for “**On Fire!**” with the Stanislaus National Forest early last year and was surprised at the interest it sparked. Soon District Rangers were showing interest and the Three-Forests Interpretive Association came on board as a producing partner. Funding has been forthcoming from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Fire Safe Council, Tuolumne County Office of Education, Columbia College Foundation, Met Life, Mariposa Fire Safe Council, Stanislaus National Forest, and other interested organizations. The Forests have also contributed in kind.

“**On Fire!**” will premiere at Fire Summit 2003, the national conference of Fire Safe Councils

and FireWise, in Tahoe City, on May 13 and 14 before moving to Carkeet Park and beginning its five weeks of touring the Stanislaus, Sierra, and Sequoia National Forests. The Carkeet Park performances will be Friday May 16 and Saturday May 17 at 6:30 PM, and Sunday May 18 at 2:00 PM, then Saturday May 24 at 6:30 and Sunday May 25 at 2:00 PM. All Tuolumne County Schools students will be admitted free. For others there is a suggested donation of \$5.00.

Other nearby performances, sponsored by local Fire Safe Councils, will be: Tues. May 20, Tenaya School, Groveland, 6:30, Tues. May 27, Pinecrest School, 6:30; Thur. May 29, Black Oak School, Twain Harte, 6:30; and Sunday, June 1, Calaveras Big Trees State Park, time and location to be announced.