Vincent Michael Joseph
Dominick Insalaco

Wanted: Poker faces to play odds for kids

I’ve long marveled at the charity poker tournament. Here you have one of law enforcement’s favorite vice targets repurposed to help the kids, the volunteer fire department, help the church.

Wally, Youth Home (the kids) is holding its third charity poker tournament Saturday at New Level Events. Doors open at 5 p.m., play commences about 7. The buy-in is $10 for $2,500 in chips, or $75 for $5,000. Winner take all.

What: Winner takes $2,500 packages from Family Leisure, retailer of outdoor patio equipment, tubs, pools and pool tables.

MELISSA TUCKER
SPECIAL TO THE DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

Ninety minutes into a six-hour-long Saturday rehearsal, Vincent Insalaco and his company have a “What Would Jesus Do?” moment. Stains of rock opera overhead, the director and cast are “blocking” the scene where Jesus storms into the temple, furiously upends the signs of commerce and banishes the traders and moneylenders.

But would he knock things over before he rebukes them? Or would he speak first? How do you feel about it? Says Insalaco the director and Jesus Christ Superstar. “Do you go berserk right away. God. They don’t settle on an answer — there’s no right or wrong to it.”

Indeed Insalaco can say what he means. He knows what’s on their minds, he said his neighbor and friend Deni-nio ligneux. “He knows their hot buttons in politics, and it’s the same thing with the theater.”

I think his success is evidence of his ability to motivate people and read them and promote love. He has managed political campaigns for mayoral, gubernatorial and congressional seats in Arkansas as well as the late Mancham Biggins’s successful prime minister bid in Israel. He did advance work for the campaigns that sent Bill Clinton to the White House in 1993 and 1997. He persuaded Northern Rock Cabinet to fund Disney-Stephens Park and business partner Judy Tenen-berg gave the Argenta neighborhood a community theater. Insalaco has been presented with a couple of lifetime achievement awards — one from the Argenta Community Development Corp. — about which he usually doesn’t settle on an answer right away.

Though he produced Cabaret last summer, Insalaco hasn’t directed a play in 50 years, and he seems contemplative, fidgety. As the cast runs through “The Temple” number he paces back and forth, adjusting props so they would better face the audience, and giving feedback. He reminds his cast that their version will have modern touches that might be confusing.

This is the first scene since the overture where we’re adding some modern things. Remember Folgers and sunglasses? Just bear that in mind, he said. “It’s going to be world premier. But we’re doing that deliberately.”

MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN

Whether directing politics or plays, developing a candidate or a character, Insalaco has made a name out of knowing his audience, of servicing the audience, and giving feedback. He reminds his cast that their version will have modern touches that might be confusing.

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Though he’s usually behind the curtains, the stages — performance or politics — are more similar than you might suspect. And while he has often found the spotlight, he deliber-

ately stays just outside its sphere. He prefers to let it shine on others, and believes he probably has attention-deficit disorder — barely fin-

ishing a sentence before moving on to another thought. He’s prepared to give his full attention to whatever is in front of him, but his mind’s an airport terminal.

For the elder Insalaco, the reward is in the work. His mind is always in the work. His mind is always in front of him, but his mind’s an airport terminal.

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CIVITAN CLUB, Page 5D

Teen leaders typify club’s vitality

As kids, they spend much of their time playing sports, so when the Civitan Club’s annual softball tournament comes around, they’re ready to go.

Akila Dus, vice president of Central High School Junior Civitan Club, and Sarah Spanos, president, update member records in preparation for the forthcoming school year.

Student leaders typify club’s vitality

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Marianna native and former pitcher Ollie Brantley helps open Negro Leagues exhibit in NLR

With a backdrop of jazz music by Rodney Block and the Real Music Lovers, visitors from Marianna joined locals to welcome former Negro League Baseball pitcher Ollie Brantley during a June 28 reception at the William F. Laman Public Library in North Little Rock.

Brantley, of Marianna, was the featured guest speaker for the opening of the library’s new exhibit, “Discover Greatness: An Illustrated History of Negro Baseball Leagues.” Attendees partook of libations and baseball-stadium food, including hot dogs and potato chips. Dessert consisted of miniature cakes made to resemble baseballs.

With grace and good humor, Brantley shared his memories of the racism and the triumphs he experienced throughout a career that began when he signed his first contract at the age of 18, joined Negro League Baseball’s Memphis Red Sox, and roomed with then-fellow Red Sox pitcher Charley Pride. Yes, that Charley Pride, the country music star! Brantley then spent time with the Chicago White Sox minor league affiliate, after which he went on to the Minnesota Twins organization. By the time of Brantley’s retirement in 1969, he’d pitched against such baseball greats as Willie Mays and Hank Aaron.

After speaking, Brantley signed autographs and posed for photos with guests.

Presented by The Negro Leagues Baseball Museum of Kansas City, Mo., the exhibit, which consists of nearly 90 framed photographs, runs through Aug. 24.

— Story and photos by Helaine R. Williams

And here’s the pitch …