

Local Spotlight: Getting to Know Lionel Ward

“A Virus Ate My Homework” A Native Ashland High-Schooler’s Experience During Times of Pandemic

By **Jordan Pease** – February 2023 Issue of **Locals Guide Magazine**- Ashland, Oregon



The privilege of growing up in a place like Ashland, Oregon isn't lost on 18-year-old **Lionel Ward**. Meet this aspiring professional thespian who shares about his love of theater, inspired by living his whole life in a theater town. Learn about his favorite places and qualities of Ashland, as well as his take-aways from navigating his teenage years while on lockdown.

From the perspective of a 18-year-old native Ashlander, what quality of Ashland do you appreciate most? I have lived in Ashland my whole life, and what never has seemed to fade away is community. So many people here who are welcoming and friendly. Ashland has built this community with local businesses and events like **First Friday Art Walk** and the **Artisan's Market** to support them. On certain holidays like Halloween, the 4th of July, and Christmas; we gather as a town to celebrate these events by parading through the streets. It's a community I am glad to have grown up in and that I look forward to visiting in the future.

What are your favorite places in and around Ashland? I admire how Ashland appeals to the tourists. Being a local, I have seen so many changes with businesses and I've been able to observe what attracts more out-of-state customers. Obviously, the **Shakespeare Festival** plays a major role in bringing in tourists, but there so many more things in and around Ashland to do. The community is so welcoming and it's pretty easy to get around most places.

About a year and a half ago, **Matcha Boba** opened up downtown and that has definitely attracted a lot of high school and college students as well as tourists. **Escape Ashland** is a super fun activity especially for tourists as it challenges a group to work as a team to solve clues and escape confinement. Both rooms they have downtown relate to our area. The first being a Western room that's inspired by the true story of a poetic bandit based around Northern California. The second based on the Scottish Play by William Shakespeare which correlates to the festival we have locally.

What attracted you to Theater, and what's a favorite role you've performed and why? When I was six-years-old my dad took me to my first play at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, "As You Like It". Although I was unable to understand the majority of the dialogue, I was enamored with every element of the production. From the beautiful sets to the costumes to the idea of performing and having everyone in the audience watching the actor on stage, I was completely taken aback.

I began developing a massive interest in Shakespeare's plays demanding my parents to take me to see more at the Festival. That same season we saw "Romeo and Juliet". I was immediately starting to realize that this is what inspired me. I memorized one of Romeo's monologues at seven and asked my parents to get me an audition for the Festival. Luckily enough, they were looking for six kids to play fairies for "A Midsummer Night's Dream" in the 2013 season. I auditioned and got the role! From March until October I was in the second and third grade while at the same time rehearsing and then performing in a professional theatre

company and having the time of my life. I was introduced to professional theatre and I am extremely grateful for the opportunity I was given.



Ever since, I have stuck with theatre performing in school productions in elementary and high school, community theatre, and recently I performed at the **Oregon Cabaret Theatre**. It's hard to narrow down one role that I'd consider my favorite because each experience has been so incredibly different, but if I consider the role itself and nothing else, being able to play Romeo in "Romeo and Juliet" during my senior year of high school was something I had dreamed of for so long and I am so happy to have been able to accomplish that goal.

What's a thing people would never guess about you? Over the last year I developed a Lego obsession. I never had gotten into them when I was younger, but being a Star Wars and Marvel fan, it was a little strange that I wasn't. My first set that I built was a Stormtrooper head. I had so much fun building it that I started a collection. I think that as I am getting older, I'm starting to work a lot more, whether it be keeping my grades up or making money, that building Legos still allow me to feel like a kid every once in a while.

What have been your main takeaways from experiencing the pandemic for the past three years? I believe the pandemic gave the entire world an opportunity to step back and realize what we should be grateful for in life. Who knew that a virus could infect a population so quickly that it could take everyone in an entirely new direction. So many people lost friends and family during this time, including myself, and it really shows that you have to appreciate the moments with the people you love. I felt within that time where I was taking classes online, I was lazy and not really motivated. I would spend my days lying in my bed with nothing to do. Once we were allowed to go back to school again, I was completely out of sync with everything. I wasn't ready to take on a busy life again and I slowly had to retrain myself to work with a positive mentality and keep myself above the surface.

What are your plans after graduating Ashland High School? I have been lucky enough to have grown up in a town that values theatre. I have gotten so much experience on stage and love the majority of the people that I've had the opportunity to work with. I am wanting to expand my experience to film, and I know that is going to take a lot of work. I am wanting to go to school in Southern California and graduate with a BFA in Acting. As I continue to work and improve, I hope to get more involved in the film industry and create opportunities for myself to book more screen roles.

What are five words to describe the rest of your life, please? Determined, successful, persistent, innovative, and supportive.

Things to know about Lionel: **Born:** January, 2005. **Astrological Sign:** Capricorn. **Generation:** Gen Z. **Favorite Book:** "Born A Crime" by Trevor Noah. **Favorite Movie:** "Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith." **Favorite Music:** Indie Pop. **Favorite Celebrity:** Ewan McGregor. **Favorite Food:** Buffalo Wings. **Favorite Beverage:** "The Lionel" at Matcha Boba (Downtown Ashland, a 24oz Thai Iced Tea, Extra Sweet, Half and Half, Extra Boba, sealed lid.)

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