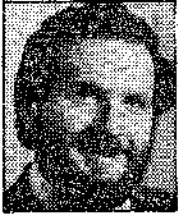


STAGE NEWS & NOTES

TOM JACOBS

Foundation gives Back Alley a \$22,250 surprise



The amazement was still evident in Laura Zucker's voice this week.

"The call came from out of the blue," she said, her tone suggesting she is just about, though not entirely, certain that she isn't dreaming. "They contacted us a little over two months ago. They told me who they were and said they were thinking of giving us money."

Uh, OK, answered Zucker, producing director of Van Nuys' Back Alley Theatre. You want to meet with us? No problem. A formal application? We can handle it.

The formal OK came a mere five weeks later. And last week, the theater received a check for \$22,250 from the W. Alton Jones Foundation of Charlottesville, Va.

The five-figure gift is "the largest grant we've ever received in a

single chunk," Zucker said. "It's just about 10 percent of our budget." She said the money will be used "to augment salaries — artistic and administrative — across the board."

The foundation, which only recently extended its philanthropic activities to the arts, also gave sizable grants to two other area organizations. The Mark Taper Forum has been allocated \$50,000 for its Improvisational

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— Laura Zucker

Back Alley Theatre's producing director

Theatre Project, which takes plays into schools for students to view. And downtown Los Angeles-based Pipeline Productions will receive \$20,000 over the next two years — money that will go toward "survival," artistic director Scott Kelman said.

According to Zucker, one does not apply to the Jones Foundation; it prefers to spot organizations on its own that it feels are worth supporting. It then invites those groups — such as the Back Alley — to apply for funds.

And why did it choose the Back Alley? "They were very impressed with the strength and growth of the theater in the past five years," Zucker said. She said foundation officials agree with her that, with some help, the Back Alley could grow into the Valley's first regional professional theater company.

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