

Vincent Michael Joseph Dominick Insalaco



Arkansas Democrat-Gazette/JOHN SYKES JR.

“People say you need to stop and smell the roses. I tell people I’m allergic to roses. To me it’s about the garden.”

Vince Insalaco has been a behind-the-scenes influence on politics and the arts in Arkansas for years. He says his late wife, Sally, was and still is a driving presence in everything he does.

MELISSA TUCKER

SPECIAL TO THE DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

Ninety minutes into a six-hour-long Saturday rehearsal, Vince Insalaco and his company have a “What Would Jesus Do?” moment. Strains 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?” Insalaco asks the titular star in *Jesus Christ Superstar*. “Do you go berserk first, and then sing, or knock everything down first?”

It’s one thing to inhabit the characters of Willie Loman or Blanche DuBois, quite another the son of God. They don’t settle on an answer right away.

Though he produced *Cabaret* last summer, Insalaco hasn’t directed a play in 30 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 T-shirts and sunglasses? Just bear that in mind,” he said. “It’s going to be weird for the audience, 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 career out of knowing his audience, of seeing things from their perspective.

“He can feel out an audience, and he knows what’s on their mind,” said his neighbor and friend Dennis Jungmeyer. “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 them.”

He has managed political campaigns for mayoral, gubernatorial and congressional seats in Arkansas as well as the late Menachem Begin’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 North Little Rock residents to fund Dickey-Stephens Park and Alltel (now Verizon) Arena. He and business partner Judy Tenenbaum gave the Argenta neighborhood a community theater.

Insalaco has been presented with a couple of lifetime achievement awards — one from the Arkansas Arts Council and another from the Argenta Community Development Corp. — about which he usually jokes, “I’m not done yet. You should have given this award to somebody else.”

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 deliberately stays just outside its sphere. He prefers to let it shine on others, says his son.

“The people who are known for running the state, he’s always been right behind them guiding, leading, watching. And he is the last person to take credit for anything,” said Vincent Insalaco III. “He knows how to be in the spotlight, he just doesn’t like it.”

For the elder Insalaco, the reward is in the work. His mind is always in motion — he often jokes about and believes he probably has attention-deficit disorder — barely finishing 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.

“People say you need to stop and smell the roses. I tell people I’m allergic to roses. To me it’s about the

See **INSALACO**, Page 5D

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, help the volunteer fire department, help the church.

Well, Youth Home (the kids) is holding its third charity poker tournament Saturday at Next Level Events. Registration is at 3 p.m.; play commences about 5. The buy-in is \$50 for \$2,500 in chips, or \$75 for \$5,000. Winner take all.

What? Winner takes a \$2,000 package from Family Leisure, retailer of outdoor patio equipment, tubs, pools and pool tables?

Chrissy Chatham is development director of Youth Home, a private psychiatric treatment center for emotionally troubled adolescents.

BA: Why can’t the winner just take the winnings?

CC: Hmm, because that’s illegal?

Ah, back to that law enforcement thing.

Well, the \$2,000 package donated by Family Leisure certainly takes the edge off that bait-and-switch, and Chatham promises there’s genuine Vegas-level excitement out there on the floor. For those who don’t enter the tourney, there are
See **AMPEZZAN**, Page 8D

UP AND COMING



BOBBY AMPEZZAN

Teen leaders typify club’s vitality



Arkansas Democrat-Gazette/JOHN SYKES JR.

Ankita Das, vice president of Central High School’s Junior Civitan Club, and Sarah Newbern, president, update member records in preparation for the forthcoming school year.

CHEREE FRANCO

ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

According to Sarah Newbern, incoming president, Central High School’s Junior Civitan club is “intense.”

With 340-plus members, Central’s chapter is purportedly the largest among about 1,300 worldwide.

Civitan International is about community service and good citizenship, so last year, the world’s largest chapter participated in more than 40 charitable events. Members organized food drives, stuffed Salvation Army Christmas stockings, staffed the Wildwood Lantern Festival and helped with parties, dances and sports tournaments for disabled people.

Keeping track of which members volunteer at which
See **CLUB**, Page 8D

THE FULL ACCOUNT

And here's the pitch . . .

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

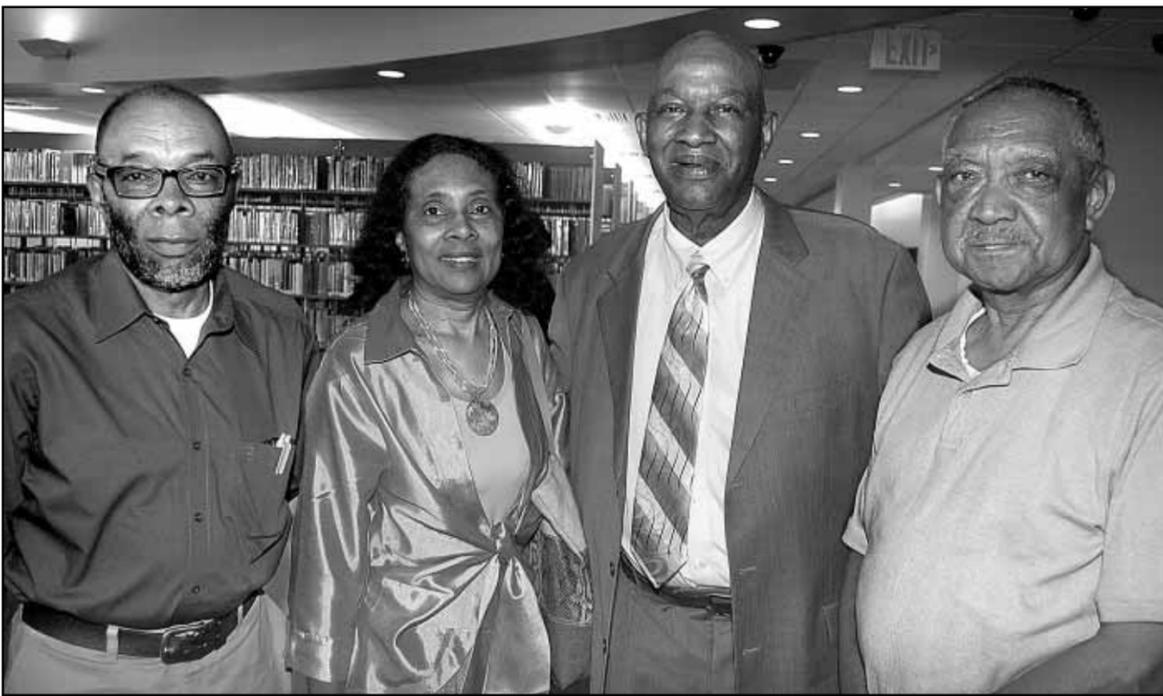
age of 18, joined Negro League Baseball's Memphis Red Sox, and roomed with then-fellow Red Sox pitcher Charley Pride. (Yes, *that* Charley Pride, the country music star.) Brantley then spent time with the Chicago White Sox minor league affiliate, after which he went on to the Minnesota Twins organization. By the time of Brantley's retirement in 1969, he'd pitched against such base-

ball 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



Featured speaker Ollie Brantley (second from right) with Ben Anthony Jr. of Marianna, and Charlotte and Rufus Lloyd of Memphis



Alivia Carroll and Celise Weems



Mary Ruth Morgan, Landon Ridgell, Buddy Morgan and Sarah Ridgell



Elizabeth Mayfield-Hart and her husband, Charlie Hart



D.J. Taylor and Marion Carter



Jonathan Burks, Rodney Block, Oliver Thomas and Patrick Pettus



Angela and J.T. Zakrzewski and the Rev. Charles and Carla Bobo



Christopher Gatewood and his parents, Christine and Curtis Gatewood