



grow, and to be consistent so that people would know it's there and will be there when they're ready to go to it. And people have responded, it seems to have really struck a chord here."

Pipkin said she designed the event to grow, hoping that each installment's storytellers would have their own draw and that those storytellers and audience members would return and spread the word, but that she "had no idea it would snowball the way it has." To date she's only purchased advertising once—announcing the premier event in this publication—and relies entirely on social media (@bonfirestorytellingchico on Instagram and her personal Facebook page) and word of mouth for promotion.

Pipkin hand-selects the storytellers for each event, with some help from her "co-conspirator" Dylan Latimer (another prodigal Chicoan and Blue Room alum who spent decades in the Big Apple before returning to town). In the month running up to performances, the storytellers meet several times with Pipkin, Latimer and each other to refine and rehearse their stories. She said that, in addition to ensuring age representation, she makes an effort to cultivate diversity and amplify underrepresented voices by always featuring queer people and people of color.

"I want it to be a reflection of our community and our world," Pipkin said, adding that an ASL (American Sign Language) interpreter has


been included at each show since September.

Pipkin decided to shake up the format a bit for the first two Bonfire events of 2024. Jan. 4 was the "Wild Card Show," a "story slam"-style event at which potential storytellers were chosen at random to tell a five-minute tale based on the prompt "It's Kind of a Funny Story." The top storytellers (judged by a panel of previous participants, including Schiff) won cash prizes. February will feature neurodivergent storytellers and a theme of "Love."

In March, Bonfire will return to its regular format, and Pipkin intends to make the Women's Club the event's permanent home. She also said she plans to extend each monthly outing to two nights, with the same set of storytellers for both shows.

"There's something that happens in the room the night of the show ... it's connection," Pipkin said of Bonfire, and of the art of storytelling in general. "I think we don't take a lot of time, in general, to truly listen to someone's story. Having a roomful of people holding that space for someone on stage ... energetically, that feels really powerful. And I think that's what has really resonated with people in the community."

"This is a time in the world when we are seeing people dehumanized and I think the act of telling a story is humanizing, and that's meaningful at this moment in time." □



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