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By Robert Lynde

TIME WARP: Christopher Daly, left, poses with two of his Red Herring cohorts in murder.

Something's fishy with players

By **DONNELL BELL**
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"You dirty rat ... you shot me ... and left me for dead — now you'll get yours!"

If you think this sounds like something from an old James Cagney movie, you're close. But, if you were thinking along the lines of a murder mystery, you'd be dead right!

The above quote is a line from a murder mystery, "Murder at Buffalo Chip," presented by Red Herring Productions.

Christopher Daly is vice president of the company, and as he talked to the *CSBJ* about its products, his excitement was contagious.

The plays Red Herring produces are melodramatic. Several clues are given throughout the performance. The audience, anywhere from 10 to 500, can be divided into teams and all suspects are questioned by the audience. Only the guilty can lie, and the audience can't help but become involved because they must solve the murder.

Daly recounted the company's inspiring history. In Old Colorado City, around 1984, a bookstore called "The Book Sleuth" was in existence. Owned by Diane Stevens, the mystery-only book store had its share of loyal customers, and was very popular with mystery buffs, Daly said. The customers, not content with just reading mystery plots, encouraged "The Book Sleuth" to put on murder mystery plays. The group from the book store went on to perform at dinner parties and other events.

A year later, a group evolving from "The Book Sleuth" gave its first performance, entitled "Reunion With Murder," at Miramont Castle in Manitou Springs. Following this production, Red Herring Productions came to be.

Now, if you think the name "Red Herring" sounds fishy, wait until you hear about *its* origins!

In the Victorian era, Daly related, and in many Charles Dickens' novels, the villain would attach a herring to his feet. As he ran away from the crime scene, the herring would slosh, sufficiently wiping away any footprints, thus foiling police pursuit.

"I don't know where the 'red' came from," Daly laughed, "maybe from the color of blood."

"In 1986, the company took off," Daly said enthusiastically. Performing western-style plays on a moving location — the Cadillac & Lake City train, which ran between Falcon and Ramah, Colo., Red Herring provided entertainment on this line for more than two years.

"By 1991, Red Herring was already successful in its own right," said Daly. The company continued to expand and operate in an entertainment mode until 1995.

In 1995, through aggressive marketing, new growth came, which led to a new corporation called Red Herring Educational Services. The new corporation was formed to apply Red Herring's presentations to training programs for educators and corporations.

"The individual challenges that a company is facing," said Daly, "we take those challenges and abstract them into characterization. Growth, for example, is requiring a lot of individuals to take on more leadership roles that they may not be familiar with. We try to understand their industry, and, within the context of a murder script, bring about instruction."

"Everything in the murder script is characterized and exaggerated. People start to under-

stand the problems much more than if they see it in their everyday environment."

"We take individual challenges to the melodramatic conclusion and [add] humorous possibilities," Daly explained.

Red Herring offers its services to the school districts through the Kennedy Foundation. The foundation provides grants through the school districts' Community of Caring. Schools that have participated in the company's performances include St. Mary's High School and Widefield School District.

Performances can be geared to demonstrate values in the workplace, team building, and leadership.

Red Herring can even demonstrate the healthy and unhealthy characteristic of employee personality types and provide sales strategies for sales organizations.

The staff of Red Herring are a diverse group of individuals, said Daly.

"We have a staff of 20 to 25 performers. Many are professional actors around town. They usually are professional actors or people who understand our product — usually both."

A few of these people include:

Larry Tacket — one of the founders of Red Herring Productions. Tacket does the writing and directing for the entertainment version of the company. He acts as well.

Don Moon — one of the owners of the company. He has performed in more than 230 roles for the company. Moon has been involved in electrical engineering design and construction, and is an interpreter/translator of the Swahili language.

Joni Sheram has taught drama and creative dramatics on the high school level. She teaches high school and is an instructor in the masters program at the University of Phoenix.

Charlie Ammen (some may remember him as Grizzly Bill) has more than 20 years of professional acting experience and has management experience in retail, food service, and special events planning.

Celeste Perkins is a mathematician, educator, and computer analyst. She has experience in team building and business process re-engineering.

Mike Stevens is a client information systems consultant who minored in theater in college. His experience includes team leading, project management, and client consulting.

Chris Daly has been a stage performer since 1981. He has extensive experience as a strategic business consultant, seminar leader, development manager, and work group facilitator. Daly is also a former city councilman and mayor of Manitou Springs.

Red Herring still focuses on the entertainment portion of its company offering to perform for pure entertainment value. However, with the addition of its educational services, it provides a new format to conference and seminar agendas. It's fun, it's motivational, and it allows participants to process the material actively, rather than in a passive format.

"Working with people, understanding them, and trying to establish relationships are what makes this business successful," Daly added. "That's the thing that makes these performances so enjoyable."

Red Herring Productions — Its motto says it best: We put the FUN in DysFUNctional!