

SACHA PFEIFFER

AROUND THE TOWNS

LIVING HISTORY

The dilemma: Staffers at Bacon Free Library in **South Natick** had good news – the library had acquired a circulating pass, good for up to four people at a time, for free admission to the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston – and they wanted to spread the word. But how?

The solution: Why not have Isabella Stewart Gardner travel to Natick and announce the news herself?

The real Mrs. Gardner passed away in 1924, although the turn-of-the-century socialite and art patron is a living legend in New England. But Jessa Piaia, a character actress from Cambridge who performs dramatic vignettes of notable women in American history, was more than happy to fill in.

So last weekend, in John Eliot Memorial Hall, a costumed Piaia transformed herself into the flamboyant Mrs. Gardner before a crowd nearly 70-strong. In her hour-long performance, which was cosponsored by the Natick Historical Society, Piaia offered a look at the woman, and her era.

Gardner was an art collector whose home in Boston's Fenway was built as a 15th century Venetian palace. In 1903, it was opened as a public museum to display her collection, which includes works by Rembrandt,



GLOBE STAFF PHOTO / TOM HERDE

JESSA PIAIA

Setting an example

Titian, Raphael and Cellini.

Piaia's dramatic repertoire also includes women's suffragist Susan B. Anthony; Civil War nurse Clara Barton, founder of the American Red Cross; Quaker martyr Mary Dyer; pioneer aviator Amelia Earhart; Rachel Revere, the wife of Paul; and actor and writer Susanna Rowson, founder of Boston's Academy for Young Ladies.

"I'm interested in the human experience, in people's life stories," said Piaia. "The lessons people teach us in their lives can set an example for us today."

WARM WELCOME

The **Hudson**-based Organization of Portuguese-American Immigrants, also known as OPAI, has a new executive director. Hudson resident Isabel Skoog, a native of Portu-

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