

Young performers take to the stage in new summer Rec. program

By Martha Marteney - Staff Writer

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On the second day of the summer theatre program, the 40 youngsters start learning the musical's choreography. Photos by Martha Marteney.

The Performing Arts Summer Project is a new youth program sponsored by the South Windsor Parks and Recreation Department in association with Lamb Theatricals. The two-week-long program will culminate in the production of "Once on This Island, Jr." with two performances on Friday, July 29.

"I think it's great," said 8-year-old Billy, of South Windsor. "I've made two friends already." Billy auditioned for the play at the end of the school year, impressing the selection

committee with his honest enthusiasm. His only previous acting experience was in a school Christmas play.

Michael Lamb began his company, Lamb Theatricals, which is based in South Windsor, in 2007. With the partner company, Performing Arts Programs, Inc., Lamb organizes educational youth theater programs throughout the state, including South Windsor's one-week program, which he has run for the past seven years, as well as the year-long Youth Collective program held at the Bushnell Theater in Hartford. "The goal is to develop skills in performing arts," said Lamb, "and to build self-confidence."

"I really enjoyed doing the year-long program," said Gabriel, 13, of South Windsor, about the Youth Collective. He was excited to learn about the two-week program in South Windsor and wanted to compare the two programs. "It's really good, because there are so many teachers who have so much knowledge in music, dancing and acting," added Gabriel.

"There's a lot of children who love doing this sort of thing," said Lamb. "The South Windsor Rec. Department values the arts." With so many budget cuts, Lamb noted that it is especially important to have such optional programming available. "This town values art and art education," he said. This summer, participation in the one-week program doubled, in addition to the 40 participants in the two-week production program.

On the second day of the two-week program, Kyle Reynolds started teaching the choreography. Reynolds is a recent musical theater graduate of Central Connecticut State University. "They are already into it," said Reynolds about the enthusiasm of the young actors. Because of the various ages and levels of experience, Reynolds starts with the basics and moves up. "And stick with the encouragement," he said.

The two-week program runs 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. "It's amazing how much they learn in basically nine days of rehearsal," said Lamb. He works closely with the children, for example, explaining how he develops the blocking, or placement of the actors on stage.

"It's a good way to get a lot of acting experience," said 13-year-old Addie, of South Windsor. She enjoys the focus and dedication it takes to pull off a production in two weeks. "You really get a taste of what it's like to act," she said.

"It is a fun program," said Musical Director Dan Brandl, "even though it's an intense two weeks." Performing Arts Programs welcomes children with any level of experience in acting, dancing or singing.

"You should try it," said Billy. "Try something for a change."