

Musical different experience for students, audience

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

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Offers chance for participation by viewers

Students involved in this year's musical, "The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee," have ventured into new waters.

When the curtain rises this Saturday night and Sunday afternoon at the Gothenburg High School performing arts center, the audience will see a different kind of show, according to director and District 20 music teacher Ernie Blecha.

"The musical is not the typical Rogers and Hammerstein show that we've done in the past," Blecha said. "I think it's a wonderful opportunity to provide the students with a variety of musical styles.

"Even though it's different, I think the audience will appreciate it all the same."

Blecha describes the production as hilarious as it chronicles the experience of six adolescent outsiders vying for the spelling championship of a lifetime.

On the local stage, the six students are Chip Tolentino (Rhett Lindholm), Leaf Coneybear (Brett

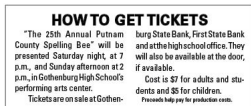
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Mann), William Barfee (Cody Cooper), Logainne Schwarzy (Bailey Gibbens), Marcy Park (Abbie Mazour) and Olive Ostrovsky (Rachel Rice).

Part of what makes the show atypical of local musicals in the past is a bit of audience involvement.



Before musical goers enter the performing arts center, Blecha said they can sign up if they'd like to be audience volunteers.

"Nobody will be asked to come on the stage if he or she hasn't written their name down on the sheet," he said.

Blecha will instruct the audience to cheer on a specific spelling bee contestant when the competitor spells a word correctly.

"In that way, they'll have much more fun as will the cast on stage," he explained. "Of course they might cheer on everyone, but it would be nice to have a group whistling and yelling for each individual contestant if possible."

The audience can also sign up to be on stage and part of the bee.

Two people will be selected from that group to enter the contest and see how well they may or may not spell.

"I think when it's over that the audience might learn a new word or two they've never even heard before," he said.

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Some of the words that will be spelled are fairly common to most English-speaking individuals, Blecha said.

And there are others he said the audience will learn to appreciate in new and interesting ways.

“Each word will be given a definition and then also used in a sentence,” Blecha explained, noting that many of the examples are humorous. “ It truly is a funny musical in many ways and we want the audience to make a a little noise now and then.”

Blecha encourages Gothenburg and surrounding community to see the musical.

“I think we have a reputation of providing Gothenburg with the opportunity to attend excellent musicals,” he said. “So I believe audience members will thoroughly enjoy themselves.



He added that cast members have done a marvelous job of getting into their characters.

“We truly have many talented and energetic students to choose from,” he said.

Students agree.

Archer Jensen (Carl Grubenierre) described the musical as a “hoot.”

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Danielle Schriver, who plays Darla Grubenierre, said the production is funny and entertaining and different from other musicals produced by GHS choral students.

“And people won’t expect the audience participation,” Schriver said.

Eric Cole (Paul), a senior, said the musical is special since it’s his last one.

Cole’s favorite part is getting to yell “dumb kid.”

Blecha pointed out that the musical received numerous awards when it was first presented on Broadway, including a nomination for six Tony awards (and received two that year). The album, Blecha said, was nominated for a Grammy Award .

Although new to Gothenburg, Blecha said the production has played on Broadway and at the Orpheum in Omaha.

ebarrett@gothenburgtimes.com

308-537-3636