

COLUMN

## NSO, Players Guild host annual theatre workshop

From the smiles on their faces to the stars in their eyes, theater magic took center stage during the annual Starshine Theatre Workshop at the Players Guild of Dearborn.

From the Front Row



Sue Suchyta

The annual event, co-hosted Aug. 6 to 10 by the Neighborhood Services Organization and Guild volunteers, provided special needs teens and young adults with the chance to rehearse and present a mini musical. This year the group presented the John Jacobson and John Higgins musical "Bugz." John Sczomak, NSO Director of Older Adult Services, and a member of the Players Guild of Dearborn, said this is the ninth Starshine Workshop NSO and PGD have offered, and each year has attracted more participants and volunteers.

He said "Bugz," which follows a group of intriguing insects as they embark on a picnic, has a moral and upbeat music. "It is short and simple, but catchy," Sczomak said. "It has a theme the participants can follow."

He said the workshop challenges the participants, who ultimately rise to the challenge. "They learn about memorizing songs, they learn about where they are supposed to go on stage, and they learn how to work together, which is a really important part of theatre," Sczomak said. "They learn to work as a team. It has been good for them, and good for us, and I think the proofs in the pudding that we have so many people that want to come back."

Guild member and volunteer Katie Garber said that choreographing the show and working with the participants has brought her closer to them as she taught them steps and discovered their personalities. She said the musical, "Bugz," is about many unique insects and how they gather together for a picnic. In addition to teaching the participants blocking and movement she said she and the volunteers work with them on their lines, and help them make props and paint the set.

"Everyone is getting a bit of a taste of what theatre is like," she said. "I think it is really great for them to come out and do something with theatre." A first time volunteer, Garber said it has been a great experience, and gratifying. "They are so happy to see you, and I see nothing but joy in their faces," she said. "It just makes me so happy to be able to share theatre with them."

Garber said many of the participants "light up" the minute they step onstage. "It is really fun to work with them," Garber said. "It's such a great experience, and it just makes me so happy to be able to help out."

Co-director and Guild member Brian Townsend, a first time volunteer, said he is working with seasoned Starshine director Marybeth Kinnell to help logistically and creatively bring the show to life. High school age Guild member volunteers are working side-by-side on stage with the participants to help them develop the show. "They help the kids around the stage, they make sure they have what they need, they are learning lyrics and lines so they can help support the participants as they sing their songs and do their choreography, and it is kind of a full-fledged show," Townsend said. "They are helping in all areas, as the participants

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SUE SUCHYTA - FOR THE NEWS-HERALD

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do. We are really exposing them to all facets of putting a show together."

Townsend said it has been wonderful to watch how the theatre experience has been transformative for the special needs participants, who rarely encounter arts opportunities like this adapted to their abilities.

"They come here, they get exposed to it, they get excited by it, they discover things about themselves and they make new friends," he said. "It is really a cool testament to how the arts can impact someone's life."

For more information about NSO programs, go to nso-mi.org. For more information about the Players Guild of Dearborn, go to playersguildofdearborn.org.

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