

## Features

# Marathon

## Young actors stage benefit to aid MDA

There was method to their madness — and not necessarily just method acting.

On Sunday, August 14, 20 young thespians of the Faestival Youth Theatre of Nazareth Academy staged a seven-hour Marathon Madness Rehearsal of the play, *You're a Good Man Charlie Brown*, to raise money for the Muscular Dystrophy Association. The marathon raised a total of \$562.75, which will be divided evenly between MDA and the theater group.

The marathon not only allowed the troupe to rehearse and raise money, it also helped the group to fulfill an overall goal, according to director Maria Sanguedolce.

"Instead of just doing a play, we've done a play with an ulterior motive — a community service," the director said. "The kids are not just doing something for themselves. Whenever they take a step to raise money, they are doing it in part for someone else." She noted that Nazareth Academy's spring play, *Annie* — which she also directed — raised \$250 for the Project Morning Star foster home.

The summer theater program is actually an outgrowth of the spring play at Nazareth. Sanguedolce, who has been directing Nazareth Academy plays for three years, decided she wanted to do more theater work during the summer and to provide a summer theater experience for students — and also simply to give them something to do.

"One of the things that we asked (the kids) was, 'Why do you want to do this — instead of just going to the beach and getting a tan?'" Sanguedolce reported. "They said, 'For something fun to do rather than just sitting around! They need some kind of structure. They seek outlets where they're challenged to learn, create, change, share and express themselves.'"

Sanguedolce approached Nazareth Academy's administration with her idea, and received permission to use the academy's facilities — and charge accounts.

The director recruited 32 students ranging in age from 12 to 20 to take part in the program. At the time that she was putting the group together, she knew of no other adults willing to help, so she asked students she had worked with to take on responsibility for such jobs as costuming, lighting and choreography.

"It's one of the best things that could have happened," Sanguedolce said. "Those kids who were 'children' in the spring are now able to take on adult roles with the younger ones."

"The thing I liked about it is this show has evolved through their ideas," she continued. "I put up the skeleton of the show, but I look to them for the meat for it. In a sense, I've become more of a consultant than a director."

Even though the Faestival Youth Theatre now has other adults involved with it — most notably Maureen Callan, who is the musical director for the show, and the theater's producer, Marie Bellavia — the young people have retained their responsibilities, Sanguedolce said. She added that in the future, she will probably continue to put the students in charge of as many areas as possible.

Another decision Sanguedolce made is that the students who participate are not charged a fee — unlike participants in Rochester Area Performing Arts or Nazareth College's Youththeatre program. Instead, they are asked to find sponsors for the play, and to participate in such fundraisers as the marathon, which, she noted, was their own idea. Because it is self-supporting, the group must raise enough money to pay its bills if it is to continue.

The students have responded enthusiastically to the challenge, Sanguedolce noted. "That was one purpose of it all," she added, "to give them a chance to own the show and to own the experience so that it's not just my show."

The Faestival Youth Theatre's first production, *You're a Good Man Charlie Brown*, will be performed at Nazareth Academy's auditorium Friday, August 19, and Saturday, August 20, at 8 p.m. and Sunday, August 21, at 2 p.m. Tickets cost \$3.50 for students and senior citizens, and \$4 for adults.

— Lee Strong



Shannon Lynch listens to directors' notes after the marathon rehearsal session.



Linus played by Mark Casey, 17, demonstrates how — with the aid of his trusty blanket — he can transform himself into a vampire.



Lucy, played by Ann Michelle Perricelli, educates Linus on her view of natural science.

Bonnie Trafelet/Courier-Journal



Charlie Brown played by Michael Casey, 17, ponders his situation in life during rehearsal of 'You're A Good Man, Charlie Brown.'



Lucy tells Charlie Brown off, after he attempts to correct her inaccurate scientific explanations.