

‘Nutcracker’: Davis magic and tradition

Forest Fairy Sophie Brennan rehearses Tuesday for the “Davis Children’s Nutcracker,” a local holiday favorite.

By Anne Ternus-Bellamy
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The magic brings them back, year after year.

First they came as 6-year-olds, most performing on the big stage for the first time in their lives. Dancing snowflakes, or tiny bears, sweets or insects.

They gathered in the various rooms of the Veterans’ Memorial Center several times a week from Thanksgiving to mid-

December, learning their little dances or sword fights or marches from the teenagers who once filled their shoes. Then opening night came, the curtains

went up, the lights came on and they were ushered into that local rite of passage, the “Davis Children’s Nutcracker.”

By then they were hooked.

Brycen Wershing came back year after year. He was a mouse one year, a soldier another. Then a frog, a clown, a gnome, the gnome king and, finally, Drosselmeyer. Then he was too old to be in the show — the 250 participants are all between the ages of 6 and 12 — so he became one of those teenagers who once led him.

For the past five years he’s been a leader, passing on all the joy he experienced as a child.

“It feels great to give back like that,”

said Wershing, who is now a senior at Davis High School.

Sophia Sears feels the same.

She, too, came back year after year to perform in “The Nutcracker” and, like Wershing, she can reel off every role: snowflake, Chinese dancer, Spanish dancer, sweet, Grandmother, narrator and Clara.

Now a sophomore at Davis High School, she serves as a volunteer every year, assisting longtime director Ann Smalley wherever she needs her, whether it’s in the booth or behind the curtain.

“I was a part of this amazing show and had so much fun and I want to give back,” Sears said, “to make it possible for all of them to have fun.”

And they do.

On Tuesday, the snowflakes and mice and soldiers were rehearsing on stage as Smalley and the leaders looked on, coached and encouraged them.

This is the 38th year of the “Davis Children’s Nutcracker,” and like every year before, it is a scene of energy and joy, wide eyes and wider smiles.

Tarin McMorrow was there to help Claudia Peri, who plays the role of Clara this year.

“She really takes the role to a new level and really puts her heart into it,” said McMorrow, a sophomore at Davis High.

And McMorrow knows about Clara — it’s a role she filled back in the sixth grade, her fifth and final year in “The Nutcracker.”

“It was such a huge part of my childhood,” McMorrow said of the annual holiday tradition. “And I love seeing the children experience what I experienced. You just really want the show to go well and you want them to do well.”

As leaders, these teenagers become not just teachers, passing on the traditions of “The Nutcracker,” but also cheerleaders, motivators and role models.

“I really appreciate how much we can influence these kids,” said Abby Sutcliffe, a

DHS sophomore. “We can be such positive role models.”

For the past three years, Sutcliffe has worked as a leader. Her sister, Emily, meanwhile, is this year’s Sugar Plum Fairy, led by dance leaders Serena Roberts and Kristy Nguyen.

Roberts, now a senior at Davis High, has been a “Nutcracker” leader since the ninth grade. Before that, she was a snowflake, a cat, a little party guest, a gnome, a flower and, finally, the Sugar Plum Fairy herself.

“I really like being able to pass on what I learned,” Roberts said. “But I like to make it as fun for them as my experience was.”

Without exception, every teenage leader asked about the job spoke of giving back, of re-creating for the children who came after them the same joy and fun they experienced being part of the show.

It’s what brings Smalley back year after year, too.

She’s served as director for 25 years now, and loves everything about the job.

“I love being part of the best group of people,” she said. “I love that the children are so bright, the leaders so enthusiastic, the tech (crew) so great. I love how everyone involved truly loves it and wants it to succeed.

“It’s very, very extraordinarily special,” she said.

The “Davis Children’s Nutcracker” is produced every year by the city of Davis Community Services Department. This year’s production runs Dec. 17-21 at the Veterans’ Memorial Theater, 203 E. 14th St.

Tickets sell out almost immediately to cast members’ families, but families’ plans change, and tickets are often available for resale. Check the bulletin board at the Vets’ Center for ticket availability.

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Leading cast members of the “Davis Children’s Nutcracker” gather for a photo Tuesday. From left are Sophie Brennan, 12, Forest Fairy; Emily Sutcliffe, 12, Sugar Plum Fairy; Claudia Peri, 11, Clara; Andrew Montano, 12, Nutcracker Prince; and Alexandra Hanna, 12, Mouse Queen.



Director Ann Smalley applauds Alexandra Hanna’s timing as she drops through the chimney in her role as Mouse Queen at Tuesday’s rehearsal.