

enterprise



Sports Devil boys win hoops tourney opener

Davis holiday tradition returns next week

A local treasure

What: "Davis Children's Nutcracker," featuring a cast of 250 kids ages 6-12 presenting a special version of the holiday classic, directed by Ann Smalley

When: 7 p.m. Dec. 16, 17, 18; 1 and 6 p.m. Dec. 19; 1 p.m. Dec. 20

Where: Veterans' Memorial Theater, 203 E. 14th St.

Tickets: \$15 each; call the city's Community Services Department at 530-757-5626 to inquire about availability

Smalley returns for another year at the helm of 'Children's Nutcracker'

By Anne Ternus-Bellamy

ENTERPRISE STAFF WRITER

On a Wednesday evening in early December, there's one place you're sure to find Ann Smalley — the same place she's spent her early December evenings every year for the past three decades: the Veterans' Memorial Theater.

Here she presides over the "Davis Children's Nutcracker," directing a cast of 250 children between the ages of 6 and 12 who begin rehearsing the week after Thanksgiving and continue right up until the curtain

rises (this year) on Dec. 16 for the first of six shows.

Just as they have every year for the past 38 years, soldiers and mice will do battle on stage; cats will prance and Spanish dancers will dance; and Clara will meet her Nutcracker Prince and venture through a forest of gnomes and trolls and frogs, meeting the Sugar Plum and Forest fairies along the way.

Little things may change from year to year: Costumes get an update here and there, a piece of the set is rebuilt. Choreography changes a bit or a new group of performers is introduced (new this year: pirates!), but the story stays the same, as do the lines. Those never seem to change.

Teenagers who once performed



Bailey Bramer plays Clara in the "Davis Children's Nutcracker."

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WAYNE TILCOCK/
ENTERPRISE PHOTO



WAYNE TILCOCK/ENTERPRISE PHOTOS

Director Ann Smalley gives stage instructions to young cast members in the “Davis Children’s Nutcracker” during rehearsals Wednesday. In the background, the Gnome King (played this year by Lucas Cardenas) presides from atop a giant mushroom, watching as the gnomes march, the frogs hop and the trolls do their troll things.

TRADITION: Young mice become leads, then volunteer teen leaders

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As part of the cast now teach little ones their lines and their dances, and after so many years being a part of this Davis tradition, they know it all by heart, ready with a prompt whenever a line is forgotten.

This show is not just a tradition in this town; it’s become a legacy of sorts for many families. Six-year-olds who performed as mice become leads as 12-year-olds, then become the teenage leaders who choreograph dances and rehearse lines with the children who follow in their footsteps. Some return to Davis as adults, and get to experience the show from a new perspective: watching their children on stage in the same roles they once held.

Such is the legacy that Smalley and the city’s Parks and Community Services Department have created for Davis.

“It’s like magic,” Smalley says. “Children of all ages love it.”

As does she — Smalley says she’s enjoying directing the production as much this year as she did the first time around some 30 years ago.

“It’s such a wonderful group of children,” she says.

When the world seems a darker place thanks to current events casting a pall as they have recently, just come here, Smalley says. Watch these children with their wide smiles, joyful dancing and earnest acting, and you’ll leave with a smile on your own face, she says.

Smalley, of course, is a big reason why, bringing to the directing job as she does an extraordinary combination of patience and encouragement, even as she runs a group of gnomes through their routine again and again and again.

“We’re just polishing your great dance,” she tells them. “I know you’re exhausted. Just one more time.”

And they happily go again.

On this evening, the dancing cats have had their turn on stage, followed by Clara (played this year by Bailey Bramer) and her brother Fritz (Elliot Dejong), as well as Herr Drosselmeyer (Jihan Moon) and the always entertaining Grandfather and Grandmother (Dean Fulks and Elisa Bourne).

The “big party guests” have rehearsed their scenes several times, before a large group of trees and trolls, gnomes and frogs appear to rehearse their own.



Filling lead roles in the 2015 edition of the “Davis Children’s Nutcracker” are, clockwise from foreground left, Braeden Ingram as the Nutcracker Prince, Paige Carlock as the Forest Fairy, Bailey Bramer as Clara, Alicia Joo as the Sugarplum Fairy and Emma Brayton as the Mouse Queen. The Davis holiday tradition, directed by Ann Smalley, will be presented next Wednesday through Sunday at the Veterans’ Memorial Center.

“It’s like magic. Children of all ages love it.”

Ann Smalley
“Davis Children’s Nutcracker” director

The Gnome King (played this year by Lucas Cardenas) presides over the stage atop a giant mushroom, watching as the gnomes march, the frogs hop and the trolls do their troll things.

They are greeted onstage by the Forest Fairy, played by Paige Carlock, who performs a solo before the scene ends.

“Great job, all of you,” Smalley tells them.

With exactly a week to go before opening night, some kids still need reminders of where to stand, where to be when the music starts; some are still waiting for costumes to their costumes, others still memorizing their lines.

But there is no stress or anxiety — just the calm encouragement exuded by Smalley and a whole lot of happy kids.

If there is one downside to the “Davis Children’s Nutcracker,” it’s that not all of the children who would like to participate can. Because the cast is limited to about 250 (chosen every year by lottery), many kids are turned away each year. The good news: being turned away one year gives a child priority the

following year.

Six performances of the “Davis Children’s Nutcracker” are planned, at 7 p.m. Dec. 16, 17 and 18; at 1 and 6 p.m. Dec. 19; and at 1 p.m. Dec. 20. All performances take place in the Veterans’ Memorial Theater, 203 E. 14th St.

Tickets are \$15. Call the Community Services Department at 530-757-5626 to find out about availability.

— Reach Anne Ternus-Bellamy at aternus@davisenterprise.net

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