

Behind the Scenes of the Davis Children's Nutcracker

📅 December 12, 2017 👤 Annie Mitchell 💬 0 Comments 🗨️ Ann Smalley, Catherine Vang, Daelin Johnson, Jennifer Schultze, Megan Mullin, nutcracker



Production assistant Jennifer Schultze (left) and costume designer Catherine Vang (right) are important to the Nutcracker production.

By Kate Meinert,
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When you open the door to the Multi-Purpose room in the Davis Memorial Theatre, on the day of a Nutcracker performance, you are entering a different world.

A rush of warm air is greeted with the sound of 250 children playing and talking. Kids every which way are playing card games, braiding each other's hair and having loads of fun.

Children are running around dressed as cupcakes, ballerinas and pirates. Teenage leaders look hassled and exhausted, but everyone knows they are secretly loving every minute of it.

"It is a little stressful at times, but it is a very positive and fun environment," former volunteer Megan Mullin said.

The staff for the Nutcracker starts preparing for the upcoming show season in September, which is when participant applications are due.

Production Assistant Jennifer Schultze oversees collecting and processing volunteer and performer applications.

The main aspect of her job is to communicate with parents and guardians. She also holds cast auditions and sorts participants into their preferred roles. Lastly, she trains volunteers to prepare for Nutcracker rehearsals and performances.

"This is my first year working as a Production Assistant with the Davis Children's Nutcracker, and I am amazed at the amount of hard work that goes into this production," Schultze said.

The Davis Children's Nutcracker would not be possible without Director Ann Smalley. She has been working with the Nutcracker for the past 32 years. She started out as a helper with the snowflakes and six years later became the director.

Her favorite part of the Nutcracker is the love and affection of the leaders and children.

"I just love the energy and magic of it. It's very special," Smalley said.

"During one performance, the Sugar Plum Fairy had been wearing slippers, curlers in her hair and chewing gum when the [Sugar Plum Fairy throne] turned [on stage]," Smalley said about one of her favorite memories of the Nutcracker. "I was shocked. I could tell the audience was shocked as well."

Each year the Nutcracker has about 50-75 volunteers and staff. Volunteers and staff members oversee different groups during the show. Most of these volunteers and staff members were in the Nutcracker and then later became a volunteer.

"When I first think of the Nutcracker I think of the fun that I had at rehearsals and how much I liked working with the kids," former volunteer Amanda Soeth said.

The volunteers and staff members coordinate dances for their groups to be performed on performance days. By the end of the second week, groups are expected to know their dances.

"My favorite part of the Nutcracker is getting to see it come together at the end of the season. It is so cool to know that the leaders and kids worked together to make the dances," former participant Daelin Johnson said.

"I think they are one of the reasons this show is so great. I don't think we could do the show without them," Smalley said about the staff and volunteers.

Costumes are another big part of the Nutcracker production. Catherine Vang has overseen the costume department for the past two years.

They have over 250 costumes. Each year they have to make two new costumes, the Sugar Plum Fairy and Forest Fairy tutus.

Each tutu takes around thirty hours just for the base structure and the embellishments take an extra ten to twelve hours per tutu. Every year, they must make adjustments and possible new

costumes to meet the needs of the participants.

Lastly, the set pieces are a key component to the Nutcracker show. The stage crew decorates the sets, and some are 30 to 40 years old.

The Davis Children's Nutcracker opens on December 13th and continues until the 17th.

Tickets are available at the Davis Veterans Memorial Theatre.