

CAU in the News



July 2013

Community Access Unlimited's mission is to provide community access through effective and comprehensive support services for people with disabilities and at-risk youth, giving them the opportunity to live independently and to lead normal and productive lives in the community.

“BEAUTY AND THE BEAST, JR.” MOVES AUDIENCES AS PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AND COMMUNITY ACTORS TEAM TO BRING NEW MEANING TO THE SHOW **Message of embracing those who are different became real-life in local production**

Elizabeth, NJ – July 3, 2013 – The recent production of the Disney classic “Beauty and the Beast Jr.” was powerful and moving, not only because of the performances on stage but also due to what went into the three-night presentation – love and compassion, understanding and patience, respect and a belief in one’s abilities to achieve and succeed.

“Beauty and The Beast, Jr.,” a production of the CAU Community Players – a combined troupe of people with disabilities and those without disabilities – was a triumph for the cast and audience, a joy to behold during three performances at Jonathan Dayton High School in Springfield June 28-30.

The cast included 84 members, a cross-section of seasoned community theater veterans, high school and elementary school students and members of Community Access Unlimited (CAU). CAU supports people with disabilities and at-risk youth to help them live independent and fulfilled lives within the community. Programs include housing, vocation and life skills training and advocacy, among others.

The CAU Community Players was established in 2011 to encourage CAU members to collaborate with the community and to stage theatric performances, according to Sid Blanchard, the agency’s executive director.

“This is an ideal production for the CAU Community Players because it parallels the message embedded in everything we do at Community Access Unlimited,” Blanchard said. “People with disabilities have the same value and ability to contribute to the community as everyone else in society yet are too often viewed as apart.”

“Beauty and the Beast Jr.” is the tale of very different people finding strength in one another and learning how to love. In Disney’s classic story set in provincial France, Maurice becomes lost in the woods on the way to the fair. He seeks shelter in an old castle but the master of the castle is a horrible beast

that takes him captive. Maurice’s daughter, Belle, must give up her freedom to save his life. Belle’s interaction with the other characters, which are very different from her, and her eventual taming of the unfortunate Beast and his ultimate transformation

back into a handsome prince teach a lesson of accepting and embracing those who are different.

“The members of CAU Community Players, both those with disabilities and those without, interacting, working together and staging wonderful productions demonstrate the value that comes from acceptance,” Blanchard added.

The sense of pride, accomplishment and self-esteem among the cast swept across the auditorium and touched the hearts of the audience as each performer stepped up and gave their all.

“I love the play. It gives me a good feeling that I was chosen for the part and that I have talent,” said CAU member Joyce Cargle, a member of the ensemble who portrayed the Aristocratic Lady.

CAU and cast member Willie White said he enjoyed rehearsals and was inspired to refine his acting skills. He has enrolled in an acting class that will be taught by fellow cast member Keith Radzion, who portrayed Cogsworth in the production.

“It’s fun, I like doing it, it keeps me busy,” White said. “I want to try and advance and do more things as an actor.”

Radzion, a member of CAU’s staff, reflected on the months of rehearsal backstage on opening night.

“It’s been inspiring to see it all come together,” he said.

“Everyone has their strengths and weaknesses and we all reach out and pick up one another. What this shows is that no matter your walk of life, we can come together as a group. It’s amazing what people can do when they put their minds to it.”

Matt Kommeyer was a non-CAU member of the cast who portrayed Lumiere. He was effusive in his praise of the entire cast.

“There’s just so much love in this group,” he said. “I truly feel we are a family.”

The production was attended by more than 900 people and raised more than \$8,600 to support the programs and services of CAU.

