

For Immediate Release
With photo, embedded



For more information:

Please contact Cara Pavia, Community Access Unlimited
80 West Grand St. Elizabeth, NJ 07202
908.354.3040, ext. 376 / email:cpavia@caunj.org

LOCAL PRODUCTION OF SEUSSICAL COMPLETES JOURNEY FOR VERY SPECIAL CAST

Community Access Unlimited members teamed with community actors to break stereotypes

Elizabeth, NJ – July 6, 2012 – “Seussical Jr.” is a story of journey, discovery and acceptance – of Horton’s journey through challenge and his discovery of love; of Jojo first being rejected but later celebrated for his creative thinking; of the struggle of the residents of the planet Who to be accepted despite their tiny size and of the bird Gertrude McFuzz to be loved despite her tail of just one feather.

That journey had a stop in Springfield this week when Community Access Unlimited (CAU) staged a three-night production of the musical, which is based on the works and characters of Dr. Seuss.

Members of CAU, which serves people with developmental disabilities, were joined by amateur actors from seven communities and three counties to form the CAU Community Players, which staged “Seussical Jr.” at Jonathan Dayton High School in Springfield June 29-July 1. This was the first such joint production in Union County.

Just as “Seussical Jr.” is a journey, so too was the CAU production, according to Marguerite Modero, a performing arts and theatre arts teacher in the Garwood School District who directed the play, assisted by choreographer Alyson Monaco of Cranford.

“We didn’t know what to expect when we began because to my knowledge a project of this magnitude has never been attempted before with this set of circumstances,” Modero said. “However, we all took a leap of faith and it was certainly more than worth it.”

The cast of more than 50 launched their joint journey six months prior to opening night when auditions and rehearsals began.

“The concept was to give everyone the opportunity to audition on an even playing field along with actors from the community and to be given the part they deserve according to their talent, ability and interest,” said Modero, who as a parent of a daughter with developmental disabilities is keenly aware of the disadvantages and stereotypes people with disabilities often face.

“I sincerely hope that the focus for the audience was the abilities all our actors displayed and not the disabilities they cope with and overcome each day,” she said. “Seussical was the perfect musical for this venture because the plot is a reflection of real life and how sometimes it takes someone like Horton to champion the cause of those who have difficulty being heard.

“In addition, I believe this was a self-actualizing experience for many members of the cast because they were able to see themselves in these characters and infuse their feelings and thoughts to make the portrayals ring true.”

That was especially true for Megan Modero, who played Jojo after being around plays and musicals her entire life.

“I’ve been waiting for this my whole life,” she said. “I finally have a real part after all the shows I’ve been in and it’s all because of CAU. They believe in us and gave us our chance. I’m so excited, I love everything about it.”

Fellow CAU member Kim Barry, who played Gertrude McFuzz, found the journey to be equally rewarding.

“Before rehearsing, I was very nervous,” she said. “I really wanted to do a great job. I couldn’t wait to see how my character came together – I wanted to make sure I did everything right. When the curtain went up I was really excited but still very nervous. I just crossed my fingers and said, ‘Just be yourself, have fun and you’ll do a really great job.’”

John Bitetto of West Caldwell, a sophomore at American University in Washington, D.C., was one of the amateur community actors who joined the CAU members and played the Mayor of Whoville. He had been in eight productions of various plays and musicals before “Seussical Jr.” and came away moved by the experience.

“This was probably the closest cast I have ever worked with,” Bitetto said. “Everybody came together to work as a team. Everyone became really close. The message of the show – that how a person looks or how they appear doesn’t really matter – transferred well to the cast. It wasn’t about CAU members and non-CAU members. It was about everyone being a family.”

Just as “Seussical Jr.” has a happy ending, so did the local production, according to Modero.

“The audience reaction was amazing,” she said. “One person shared with me that their family did not realize half the cast and leads were CAU members because of the polished performances. They were stunned to find out the true number of actors who were not outside community participants. I sincerely feel that their performance changed public perception in so many ways.”

Mercedes Witowsky, associate executive director of CAU, agreed. CAU provides support programs and services to people with disabilities and at-risk youth to enable them to live independently in the community. Support comprises housing, vocational and life-skills training, education, advocacy and recreation, including art and creative expression.

“The performance showed in two hours what CAU has been doing for the past 33 years – that anything is possible,” she said.

The journey of the CAU production of “Seussical Jr.” had a smooth landing, as well, which will help continue funding programs such as this. About \$7,500 was raised through the sale of more than 800 tickets, T-shirts and candygrams to cast members.

Yet for Modero the most rewarding moment came at the cast party, when CAU member Joyce Cargle shared a letter of thanks that read, “Thank you for letting me to be part of the cast. I learned a lot and tried my best. It was an honor to be part of Seussical.”

About CAU

Community Access Unlimited (CAU), celebrating its 33rd anniversary in 2012, supports people with special needs in achieving real lives in the community. CAU provides support and gives a voice to adults and youth who traditionally have had little support and no voice in society. CAU helps people with housing, life skills, employment, money management, socialization and civic activities. CAU also supports opportunities for advocacy through training in assertiveness, decision-making and civil rights. CAU serves more than 4,500 individuals each year. For more information about CAU and its services, contact us by phone at 908.354.3040, online at www.caunj.org or by mail at 80 West Grand Street, Elizabeth, NJ 07202.

Photos below

Photo – [CAU Cast]



The CAU Community Players.

Photo – [CAU Jojo]



Magen Modero, who played Jojo is Community Access Unlimited's recent production of "Seussical Jr."