

The Gazette

Gaithersburg Inclusive Theatre Company brings Germantown mentor back year after year

Germantown student has over 900 student service hours with ArtStream

By Samantha Schmieder, Staff Writer

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For Northwest High School senior Hannah Kauffman, mentoring ArtStream's Gaithersburg Inclusive Theatre Company for the past five years has been more than community service — it's been a passion.

"I started in eighth grade with no expectations," Kauffman, who turns 18 on April 25, said. "We have 18 or 20 actors with a complete range of abilities. Just being able to see them grow over the five years I've been here has been amazing."

ArtStream's general mission statement, according to its website, is to "create artistic opportunities for individuals in communities traditionally underserved by the arts." Part of that occurs through its Inclusive Theatre Companies in Gaithersburg, Silver Spring, Arlington, Raleigh and at George Mason University that are open to adults with intellectual disabilities, learning disabilities and those who are on the Autism Spectrum. There are two groups in Gaithersburg and Kauffman has been working with Group B.

Nicolette Stearns, a cofounder of ArtStream, has children around Kauffman's age and noticed her in their plays and social groups.

"We needed mentors at ArtStream. She's kind, smart, a quick study, respectful and very much a leader in the group. I asked if she wanted to come and she never left," Stearns said.



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Northwest High School senior Hannah Kauffman (center) works with actor Al Richardson of Gaithersburg (left) and others Tuesday at Gaithersburg's Casey Community Center to produce a play.

If you go

'The Lost Toys' and 'Broadway Story'

When: 7:30 p.m. May 7-8, 2:30 p.m.

May 9-10

Where: The Historic Stage at Olney

Theatre Center, 2001 Olney-Sandy

Spring Road, Olney

Tickets: \$12.50-\$15

More information: www.art-stream.org

Montgomery County Public School students must each earn 75 Student Service Learning (SSL) hours in order to graduate and 260 or more for a special tassel to wear at graduation, Kauffman explained. After Tuesday, she said she has earned 900 SSL hours in the five years she has been involved in ArtStream.

"It's just one of those things you have to like doing. Even if I didn't get the SSL hours, I would still do it," Kauffman said.

Stearns explained that Kauffman is a prime example of a student really taking something away from their SSL hours rather than just doing something once and moving on.

"She actually comes in and makes a difference. She came

here, wanted to give and she really is someone who took a lot away,” Stearns said. She added that Kauffman has even used her experience at ArtStream to guide her future career path and is planning on studying musical theater as well speech pathology in college.

Not only does Kauffman mentor the members, but she performs in the play with them, as well. She explained that sometimes being up on stage and working with the actors with lines and choreography helps everything run smoothly.

“We do an original musical every year that is derived solely from the actors, director and team. For us by us,” Kauffman said.

This year’s play, “Broadway Story,” also features a play within the play called “Gaithersburg the Musical.” During rehearsals on Tuesday, the actors practiced a song lamenting the woes of the Red Line as they waited for the metro at Shady Grove.

Terrel Limerick, 43, lives in Rockville and is one of the actors in this year’s production. His favorite part of the program is when all of the actors, mentors and directors work together to write their original play.

“We write all together. We have to talk and give ideas back and forth,” Limerick said. “I like to give my ideas and they like to hear my ideas and they put all the ideas together for the play.”

Kauffman said that her favorite part of each cycle is also the time they all take at the beginning to write the play.

“These unconventional ideas you don’t think will go together that completely do,” Kauffman said smiling, while recalling the space monsters and Greek mythology from previous years.

“Broadway Story” and Group A’s play, “The Lost Toys,” will be performed at The Historic Stage at Olney Theatre Center from May 7 to 10. Both plays, according to Stearns, are “very sweet stories about family, finding who your people are and belonging.”

“All my friends come see the shows. They all know the actors, they love seeing the actors, they love the actors,” Kauffman said. “And I love the actors too, for all of their quirks.”

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(From left) actor Terrell Limerick of Rockville, volunteer mentor Lisa Allen of Frederick, actor Kirsten Davidson of Bethesda and Nicolette Stearns, co-founder of ArtStream, rehearse a play at the Casey Community Center in Gaithersburg.



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(From left) Actors Andrea Geller of Rockville, Conor O'Shaughnessy of Silver Spring, Manoj Kumaroo of Silver Spring, Shelley Belgard of Rockville and Kathleen Maloney of Rockville rehearse a play under direction of Julia Cowles (far right) of ArtStream at the Casey Community Center in Gaithersburg.



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(From left) Actor Cecelia Pauley of Silver Spring, actor Al Richardson of Gaithersburg, Northwest High School senior and volunteer mentor Hannah Kauffman, actor Ming Yeh of Rockville and actor Davin Golder of Rockville listen to direction from ArtStream staff member Julia Cowles of Silver Spring (back to camera).