

Rambler

TEXAS MEDIA

Children explore performing, theater production

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by Kevin Keigher



Photo by Kevin Keigher

Irving—Irving Youth Theatre held a one-day summer mini-camp for children at Our Redeemer Lutheran Church on Saturday, July 8. The event promoted auditions for the theater’s upcoming rendition of the musical, ‘Finding Nemo Jr.’

The camp taught children about theatrical production and finished with a dance number for the kids’ families.

Camp started with all the children playing a game to familiarize themselves with commonly used theater terms such as “striking” and “blocking.”

The kids were then divided into groups and explored one of five stations, where they learned about different aspects of theatrical productions. They learned about singing and dancing, making costumes, creating props and sets, makeup and acting.

After a quick lunch break, the kids began rehearsing their rendition of the song “Big Blue World.” They ran through the song multiple times, improving with each passing attempt until they could perform it by themselves with no instructions from the director, Michael Hill.

To cap the camp off, the kids’ families were invited to watch them perform the song.

Many families decided to stay after the performance to help clean and talk to the founders of the Irving Youth Theatre, Michael and Lisa Hill.

Michael and Lisa Hill felt called to action after noticing the city’s previous youth theater had been dissolved 15 years ago with no replacement. After talks with the Entertainment Series of Irving, an organization that Michael Hill is a member of, the Hills received a sponsorship to establish a resident artist group in the city.

“When you are a resident artist group and not some commercial company coming in to use the facilities, there’s more of a partnership with the city of Irving or its board,” Michael said. “There’s better funding, and it’s a good partnership.”

This funding allows the group to rent stages for the children to perform on. Instead of putting on plays in local gymnasiums, the Irving Youth Theatre can host performances in the Irving Arts Center.

The Hills also receive support from Our Redeemer Lutheran Church. The church allows the theater company to store props and sets in its storage room, helping the Irving Youth Theatre to save about \$100 a month in storage fees.

“Both of their parents were members of Our Redeemer Lutheran Church years ago. They have all since passed. Mike was actually a youth director there for, I think, about 10 years,” Janet Curry, the church’s previous director of Sunday school, said. “We’ve stayed friends with them, and Mike and I are on the Entertainment Series of Irving board together.”

‘Finding Nemo Jr.’ will be the youth theater’s second performance.

Michael is a primary music teacher at North Hills Primary School, and Lisa is the director of human resources for Irving ISD. As a result, they primarily promoted their first performance to the kids they already knew.

“When we did ‘Aladdin,’ we started from video audition through rehearsal, rehearsal, rehearsal to performance,” Lisa said. “For this one, we wanted to have the camp feel because it exposes kids and gives them a chance.”

“There was one kid who said ‘I have bad stage fright’ but he did a great job. He didn’t want to speak but he got up there and smiled and had a good time. The summer camp is a good way of exposing them to theatre and musical theater, especially if they’ve never done it before.”

Children (5-14) who want to audition for a role in ‘Finding Nemo Jr.’ must submit their video auditions by Sept. 17. There will be an audition workshop held on Sept. 23.

The full musical will be performed from Feb. 9-11 in the Irving Arts Center’s Dupree Theatre.

More information regarding auditions can be found at <https://irvingyouththeatre.com/home/auditions/>.