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June 25, 2014

Nederland students, alumni walk the yellow brick road

Mary Meaux
The Port Arthur News

NEDERLAND — Nederland High School students and some recent graduates are trading their time off to walk the yellow brick road.

The youth, participating in the Steve Barton Summer Musicals in concert with Nederland Independent School District, are presenting *The Wizard of Oz* at 7 p.m. Friday and 1 p.m. Saturday at the Nederland Performing Arts Center, 2101 N. 18th St., in Nederland. Tickets are \$5 for children and \$7 for adults and can be purchased at the box office.

Noelle Nevala, an NHS student, donned the iconic blue gingham dress and ruby red slippers for her role as Dorothy. She was joined on-stage by fellow students Jordyn Mitchell, the Tin Man; Ed Seymour, Cowardly Lion; and Laurel Kroesch, Glinda the Good Witch. Recent grads Ryan Sherer portrays the Wizard and Justin Eaglin, the Scarecrow.

Eaglin, a 2013 graduate, is currently enrolled in college and majoring in electrical engineering.

"I'm not a vocal major though I spent four years in music and three in musical theater," Eaglin said. "College is stressful and I don't have a chance to sing. This (summer production) is fun and it's a way to get back in the community."

Seymour is no stranger to the stage either having taken classes in theater and theater production. His demeanor is quite opposite from the Cowardly Lion he portrays, he said with a laugh. Theater is in his blood and he plans to pursue a career that involves theater and music.

Roxane Gray, NHS theater director, Renee Kloes, NHS choral director and founding producing artistic director, and Kim Williams, former teacher director and also a founding producing artistic director, began working with the students and young adults less than three weeks ago.

"Casting was done at the end of the school year and includes not only our students in Nederland ISD but alumni as well," Gray said.

The group practices from 8 a.m. until about 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. The cast is learning all aspects of the theater.

"Some have never done musicals before," she said. "They are learning what goes on backstage, how to produce a musical. They have more confidence on stage and become better performers and have more knowledge of musical theater."

As she spoke the actors began rehearsing the scene in which the Wizard prepares to leave the Emerald City in a hot air balloon. Sherer walked to the large basket where ropes were laid out to the sides and a cable attached to the top. The balloon and the mock-up of Dorothy's house were loaned by West Brook High School while other items such as costumes were loaned by All Saints Episcopal School and Beaumont Community Players.

Volunteers also came in to assist with the production including Lance Orta, a former student who has been involved with the Steve Barton Summer Musicals since its inception five years ago. Orta is currently enrolled in college out-of-state and came back to help with the sets, Gray added.



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Justin Eaglin as the Scarecrow, left, and Noelle Nevala as Dorothy, right, awaken Jordyn Mitchell as the Tin Man during rehearsal in the Steve Barton Summer Musicals production of *The Wizard of Oz* at the Nederland Performing Arts Center on Wednesday. Mary Meaux/The News

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