

LAKE PLACID NEWS

ON THE SCENE: Northwood, North Country schools present ...



Noel Carmichael, left, is the director of Northwood School's drama program, and Courtney Allen is the drama teacher at North Country School. (Provided photo — Naj Wikoff)

Northwood School and North Country School joined together to stage Paul Fleischman's play "Seedfolks" Feb. 11 and 12 at the Lake Placid Center for

the Arts.

Both performances drew large appreciative audiences, primarily from the two schools' extended communities. The joint presentation evolved out of Northwood's 2019-20 school year theme of community.

Noel Carmichael, the director of Northwood's drama program, came up with the idea for a joint production this past December. Her initial plan was to include the Lake Placid Central School District along with area home-schooled youth. However, as Lake Placid already had its winter schedule well in hand, it became a two-school collaboration, which was probably just as well for such an initial effort.

Paul Fleischman adapted the play from his award-winning children's novel, "Seedfolks," that tells the story of a diverse mix of people living in an immigrant neighborhood coming together to clean up a rubbish-strewn lot and turn it into a vibrant community garden.

Twenty-five students from the two schools took on 50 roles averaging two roles per student. Eighteen students handled lighting and sound, set design and construction, and stage crew tasks. One other, Adelia Castillo, served as the student director.

A slight challenge was the age spread as Northwood is a high school, and those drawn from North Country were of elementary and middle school age.

At Keene Central School, students of all ages and classes are routinely pulled together, be it for school plays or educational extravaganzas like their annual Science Slam, so for them, it's no big deal. For Northwood and North Country, however, it was somewhat of a challenge, but as everyone was working on a shared goal organized within a very tight one-month turnaround, the students not just jelled, but they found they had a lot to learn from each other.

“It’s fun to see a community of kids on stage and behind the scenes coming together to create and present a play about community,” said Northwood English teacher Tony Miller, who served as the assistant director. “I think it’s been going very well with elementary schoolers, middle schoolers and high schoolers all working together. Both schools were working on sound, lighting and all other aspects of the tech.”

“It was a little stressful towards the end when we had to pull everything together,” said Northwood junior Angie, working the sound/lighting booth for the first time. “But it was very cool working with North Country School as that was so different. We’ve never done a collaborative play with another school before. It was fun meeting and getting to know new people, experiencing their different methods and approaches to putting on a play, and creating the sets with them.”

“I’ve enjoyed learning about North Country School and how they do things,” said Jazzy. “I had two roles to play. Learning how to do that was eye-opening. That process has helped me open up more and be more confident when I act.”

“It’s been a fun process working with another school,” said North Country student Tiri. “I’ve learned a lot from watching how the Northwood students do things in the sound booth.”

Steven, also from North Country, was inspired by the process; for him, too, it was a new experience. He enjoyed learning how to build sets while interacting and working with people he’d never met before. Steven said Northwood junior Angie helped guide him through the process and learn what he needed to do. He said Angie also taught him how to be a better actor and a better person. Steven said he hadn’t shown her how to raise chickens or take care of a horse yet, normal activities at North Country, but he would be happy to do so if she wished. Angie praised how well the North Country students handled stress. She said they taught her how to center herself and helped her stay calm, especially during the final days leading up to the opening night.

“I liked seeing the friendships develop and the mentoring, how students of the two schools assisted each other,” said Courtney Allen, the drama teacher at North Country. “I hope we can do something like this next year and bring in Lake Placid Central. While there are differences between the schools, there are far more similarities. What comes across through this joint effort is those similarities. Everybody’s important, no matter who you are or what’s your role. We are all working on telling a story together. Any discussion of differences, haven’t come up; it’s all been about how to make this work.”

Two North Country graduates acting in the play, Kendan, and Thebe, are now Northwood students. They praised both schools and loved that they are currently collaborating. Thebe felt that North Country was more outdoorsy, be it taking care of animals, growing food or hiking in the mountains, while Northwood uses sports more as an outlet, one that often takes them far beyond the campus.

Parents of the students were no less pleased by the collaborative nature of the program, along with the experiential benefits. Kathy Nguyenle, whose son Kirk took on two roles, said that acting in Northwood’s plays has provided her son, who is passionate about science and robotics, with an artistic outlet. She also feels that engaging in art activities will benefit his science-based activities through helping him think creatively.

“This is his third play,” said Kathy Nguyenle. “He thinks it’s fun; it’s something he wakes up for every day. I thought all the kids did a wonderful job. The play was very multi-cultural and very deep. It was a good story, and it created community. It was very much worth the trip. I am so glad I came.”

“At first, I thought there was no way we’re going to pull this off,” said Kirk. “But it happened, and it was fun.”

Northwood senior Ana has participated in all the plays and musicals thus far presented in the school’s fledgling drama program.

“I think Northwood’s drama program is amazing,” said Ana. “A lot of time Northwood is thought of as more of a sports school, one where kids come to ski or play hockey, but over the past three years, thanks to the hard work of Mrs. Carmichael and others, Northwood is becoming seen as more rounded. At first, we started on a little stage at Northwood with just a few students turning out, and now we’re are working on the large stage at the LPCA, and this time in partnership with another school. I think that’s cool.”

“I think they did a great job,” said Carmichael. “I am very pleased. I’m going to take a few weeks off (from coaching plays) , and then yes, I’ll start planning another show.”