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Playing the outreach role

Lincoln theater director, students revive program

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 BY EMMA JACKSON
News Staff Reporter

Martin Jacobs is a bubble buster.

A teacher and director of theater at Lincoln High School, Jacobs arrived nine years ago to revive a languishing drama program and in doing so looked beyond the stage apron.

"I wanted to break out of the Lincoln bubble and get outside into the community," Jacobs said. "I want the students to have the experience of performing in new environments and showing the community what we can do."

Almost nonexistent a decade ago, the program now includes a full repertoire during the school year, with productions at the Ypsilanti Heritage Festival, Mott Children's Hospital and at festivals in Essexville. Much of the effort is student-driven, Jacobs said, and he merely supplies the vehicle.

"I basically started from scratch," Jacobs said of the early years. "I found that kids wanted drama and after three years we had a solid program."

Along with building a theater arena that includes musicals, comedies and dramas, a drama club was formed. The club has about 30 members who meet twice a month; all are required to help with school productions, on stage or backstage.

Andrew "A.J." Patton, 16, said the club differs from other student organizations because of the student initiative.

"We are a lot more self-sufficient. We have adult input but most of the stuff is delegated and done by students," Patton said. "Everything we do is a reflection of us."

Brittney Nichols, 16, joined the Drama Club her freshman year. She said her mother credits the theater outlet with breaking her shell.

"I was shy and quiet, and now I have a mindset of showing what makes me the best person for the part or the job," said Nichols who has a part in the school's musical "State Fair" and is Jacobs' student assistant. "Drama Club is a place where we make people feel welcome, like they belong."

Taking a break from rehearsing his lead role in "State Fair," Patton said

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students involved in the drama program develop strong ties.

"The atmosphere becomes like family," Patton said. "Drama brings together a diverse group of people and it has enhanced my high school experience probably more than anything else."

Bethany Michowski, 17, who has the female lead opposite Patton, is the student director for the play and is also president of the drama club. She said the club has a unique niche at the school.

"We are a really tight group and when we come here, it's like we're in a different world," Michowski said while sitting in the auditorium where "State Fair" will be presented. "Unlike athletes who practice as they play, we practice every day for the one big game or event."

Jacobs said the club and the overall drama program is an open door for those who might not fit into other extracurricular options.

"Drama Club gives kids a creative outlet," Jacobs said. "We're inclusive and a place where eccentricities are accepted and celebrated."


The musical, presented this week, includes a cast of 50 and is the main fall performance. Once the four-day run of the show is complete, the curtain opens on the next phase of the program. There is a one-act festival, the Michigan Interscholastic Forensic Association competition, a children's theater production, a storytelling troupe and the spring play "R.U.R" to prepare. Some of the plays are student-directed and will be presented in off-site venues. The students see the community outreach as good public relations.

"Acting is a really easy way to get involved with the community and to share what we've done," Patton said. "It's a way to relate."

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