

Islanders set to show off their talents at tonight's show



Rebecca Heavey sings her version of "The Star Spangled Banner" for the judges during last Monday's Community Chorus talent show auditions.

Photo by Andrea von Hohenleiten

By Patti Cassidy

Talented islanders turned out in force Monday night to audition for the 20th annual Jamestown Community Chorus talent show, which will be held tonight at 7:30 p.m. at the recreation center.

"Summer Song," a group of friends who gather each week to sing just for the love of it, performed "Words," a lively a capella piece.

In the audience, Ava White, a 13-year-old student at Wheeler School, sat with a copy of her offering, a Robert Service poem, in her hand. Nearby, Rebecca Heavey got ready to work the crowd with her version of the Star Spangled Banner, while Kim Oakes – who had come from Warwick for the auditions – hummed as she waited to sing a popular oldies tune.

But those who worried that they might face a vicious "American Idol" type of judging panel immediately had their fears put to rest. The four judges, Frank Darigen, Pat Perry, Ginger Holland and David MacLean, all members of the Jamestown Community Chorus, were supportive of all performers – even though it meant occasionally waiting for an extra take to get something just right.

According to B.J. Whitehouse, music director for the Community Chorus, performers who have appeared in some of the original shows now have

children who are auditioning for spots. Whitehouse helped some performers tighten up their acts so they could make the most of their talents. He changed a microphone here, coached a singer there as he accompanied her on the piano and fine-tuned a recorded background for another performer.

Whitehouse said that sometimes, participants aren't quite ready to appear on stage and are urged to work on their acts for another year.

"After all, we only have three days from audition to show time, and we want each performer to put his best foot forward," he said. "We want the audience to be delighted every time. So acts have to be performance-ready when they show up for auditions."

Pianist Sam Hollister, a 13-year-old Lawn Avenue School student who regularly competes in Eastern Division Music Teachers' National Association competitions, said that although he may get nervous in front of other audiences, it's a different story at the Community Chorus talent show. He's performed here three times before, so he knows what to expect.

"I really like playing here," he said. "I know the audience is friendly, so I can really relax and do my best."

Kim Oakes has also performed at other events around the state, but said she loves coming here

because it's so professionally done.

Although performers don't have to be from Jamestown to be in the talent show, they do need to reflect the community as a whole.

Whitehouse said that the event is on the "talent show circuit," meaning it pulls in participants from all over the area. But, he said, if everything is equal between two performers and one needs to be cut, the Jamestown will get the spot.

For that reason, organizers try to include as wide a range of performers as possible. In fact, the more unusual the talent, the better chance it has of finding a place in the line-up. Performers of different ages are also encouraged – approximately half of those who audition are children and they make up approximately 40 percent of the final cast, according to Whitehouse.

Because some acts – such as Kathy Brownell's Follies – return each year, they become audience favorites. In fact, their previous performances are considered their auditions, so they don't need to audition every time. They just need to let the judges know what they're going to do.

The annual talent show is a Jamestown Community Chorus fundraiser, which helps support its concerts, music awards for local musicians and an ongoing CD collection of choral music at the Jamestown Philomenian Library.

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