

East Haven Theater Staging Two Hit Musicals in July

EAST HAVEN – High school musicals aren't just for high school performers anymore—more than 50 budding actors and singers, some as young as nine, are busy rehearsing for their July productions of High School Musical 2 and Little Shop of Horrors, both sponsored by the East Haven Arts Commission Theater's summer program.

Now in its seventh year, and after 10 musical productions, the youth theater presentations have become an annual event. At a recent rehearsal for Little Shop of Horrors at East Haven's Hays School, the actors sang and danced their parts amid buzzing fans in the sweltering gym, seemingly oblivious to the afternoon heat. Their director, Cindy Genzano, is the arts commission's chairperson and head of the summer program's young adult division for students entering 11th grade through age 26. She is also an English teacher at North Branford High School.

The chance to do quality work with young people who are interested in theater is what has motivated Genzano to hold rehearsals after school for 12 hours a week since mid-May.

"No one is ever turned away, even if they have a hard time coming up with the \$100 participation fee," she said. "Kids should never be precluded from doing what they love just because they can't pay."

Genzano noted that the program's goal is to foster appreciation of the arts in local youth by engaging them in affordable theater activities as actors and costume, prop, and set designers. While the majority of participants are from East Haven, others come from surrounding towns and magnet schools. In addition, several high school and college interns are part of this year's staff and three high school students are working on their senior Capstone projects.

Callie Fusco, 15, is enjoying her sixth summer experience. A theater student at New Haven's Cooperative Arts and Humanities High School, she is further honing her acting skills with roles in both productions.

"It's a good summer experience and I get to meet new people," she said. "The atmosphere is very nice and fun. It's a good thing to be involved with."

Another long-time performer is Kari Collins, 25. After seven years, she is comfortable playing multiple roles as junior division director, director of High School Musical 2, and actor in Little Shop of Horrors. Collins especially enjoys working with her younger group of 41 students, who range from 5th-graders to high school seniors.

"We make sure that everyone in the summer program has a shining moment," she said. "With the younger kids, I like watching them come out of their shells, be supportive of each other and end up as friends."

The public is invited to attend both musicals. High School Musical 2 will be performed on Friday and Saturday, July 13 and 14 at East Haven High School at 7 p.m. It's the second installment in the popular High School Musical trilogy about the lives and loves of students at fictional East High.

Part horror comedy, part rock musical, the cult classic, Little Shop of Horrors chronicles a hapless worker in a florist shop who raises a plant with a taste for human blood and flesh. It will be presented on Friday and Saturday, July 20 and 21 at 7 p.m., also at the high school.

Tickets are available at www.ehactheater.org or at the door, and are \$14 for adults and \$12 for seniors and children under 12.

For more information on this nonprofit organization, visit www.ehactheater.org.