

Kids in need to experience life-changing magic of theatre



By Brock Weir

Live theatre has always been known to weave a little magic, but when you start young this magic can help you for the rest of your life.

Over 20 local underprivileged kids will get to experience this magic first hand this fall thanks to Marquee Theatrical Productions and your support for Magna's Wild, Wild West Hoedown.

The Aurora-based Marquee is one of 20 community partners for this year's Hoedown, York Region's biggest fundraising party, which will take place September 15 and 16 at Magna's Wellington Street East headquarters.

Each of the 20 organizations will receive a share of 100 per cent of this year's proceeds, and Marquee will be using their share of the pot to broaden the theatrical and life horizons of children who might not otherwise have the opportunity.

"We always apply hoping to be selected, but we never expect to," says Marquee's Sheryl Thomas, "but we are thrilled and honoured because it just validates what we do, that our work is worthwhile in our community, and the funding is always so very much needed here. We're finding we're getting so many kids from York Region we're actually bursting at the seams. We're clearly serving our community with something they need and want."

Oftentimes, however, money can be a barrier to actually receiving what you want and need, barriers Ms. Thomas says need to be broken down.

"All of our fundraisers here in York Region help us to help kids come to our programming," she says. "Usually they are kids from foster families, Girls Inc., sometimes Yellow Brick House or the Children's Aid Society. They are kids who are less fortunate, so what we do is raise funds to pay for them to come here, be a kid, have fun, be accepted, and learn amazing skills through a fun activity, which is musical theatre.

"They are just like every other kid, but they just don't have the money. That is a silly barrier and it shouldn't be a barrier to them coming here to learn just like everyone else. Some of them will come with behavioural issues and things like that, but it is something that we are able to work through.

"I am sure many of them will come with low self-esteem, low self-image, confidence and that kind of thing and that is the greatest life skill I hear from most parents. 80 per cent of parents for sure say that this is the greatest thing they have seen in the growth of their child and that applies later to other elements in their life, whether it is doing a speech at school or just going into a restaurant and ordering something for themselves. Little small things that you know, to your child, is massive. It is communication skills and they are critical. Huge, huge, huge."

Some of the Hoedown funds will also go towards helping Marquee pay royalties and secure the rights for theatrical productions that keep their services in demand. By helping cover those costs, it, in turn, helps keep the user fees the same across the board.

With that in mind, Marquee has a full slate coming up this fall.

Their adult cast productions begin this fall with *All Shook Up*, a musical based around the iconic tracks of Elvis Presley, followed by the classic *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* and the fan-favourite centrepiece automobile is already being assembled in Marquee's

Industrial Parkway North workshop.

The intermediate youth groups will be tackling *The Sound of Music* and *The Lion King*, while the kinders (ages four to six) will bring to life *Willy Wonka Kids* and *The Journey To Oz*.

Teens, on the other hand, will focus on the classic *A Chorus Line* and the more recent favourite *The Addams Family*.

‘We did *The Addams Family* with our summer camps and we did a junior version,’ says Ms. Thomas. ‘The teens that I had hired as staff this summer fell in love with the show so much because it is so funny, the music is so great and there are so many opportunities for parts for people they came to me asking to do the show?’ so we’re doing the show!?’

But first: Hoedown.

The Marquee Team is busy out in the community pulling their weight by selling Hoedown Tickets. They have been frequent fixtures at the Aurora Farmers' Market selling tickets books at a time, and they were at Upper Canada Mall this past Saturday selling tickets as well.

In previous years, they would have sold a bounty of tickets during their summer camp shows but a snag at the other end meant tickets weren't ready by the time of performance, leading them to seek other ways to meet a shortfall.

‘I think we have picked up some momentum,’ says Ms. Thomas. ‘We have added an incentive to our fall program for people where there is a discount to their fall tuition fees if they sell a book, and it is cumulative for each book. If people buy their tickets from marquee, every penny of the ticket they have purchased from Marquee goes towards sponsoring a child to come to Marquee, a child who would not otherwise have the opportunity to do so.’

For more information on how to buy your tickets from Marquee, visit www.marqueetp.com. For more on Hoedown, visit www.hoedown.ca.