

# Capital carolers

## Choir's dreaming of a White House Christmas

BY TIM SMITH  
STAFF WRITER

Diana Sloan of Farmington Hills is not expecting to meet President Bill Clinton on her trip to the White House, where she'll perform a holiday show on Tuesday with 24 other fourth- and fifth-graders in the Detroit Country Day Junior School choir.

But Sloan has an idea what she'd say to him.

"I'd tell him he's a pretty good president," said Sloan, 9, "and thanks for inviting us."

Matt Bedikian and Adam Zalesnak, also of Farmington Hills, couldn't agree more about the 40-minute concert, scheduled for 2:50 p.m. Tuesday.

"It's very exciting," said Bedikian, 10. "My parents (Edward and Mary Bedikian) are really happy for me."

"My mom wants me to see the Supreme Court because she's a lawyer."

Zalesnak has been looking forward to the trip since he found out he made the audition — though it took awhile to sink in.

"The day after the auditions, they posted the names of people who were going," said Zalesnak, 9, who will be chaperoned by his father, Howard. "I walked into the room and everyone yelled, 'You made it. You made it.'"

"I wasn't sure what I made,"

The Country Day singers, led by music director Marilyn Collins and accompanied by pianist Rochelle Barr, will run through a quick-paced selection of Christmas, Hanukkah and even secular songs.

Collins, during a rehearsal break, said the school sent an au-

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Marilyn Collins  
music director

dience tape in August, but didn't get a response until October. But the people in the White House Social Office (which is overseeing the event) wanted Country Day to sing on Monday, Dec. 12, the night of the school's annual holiday program.

"So I had to turn them down," Collins said, with an almost embarrassed look. "They had to come up with a second date for us. And there's no way we would have pushed for a third."

The music director, meanwhile, said the school obviously stands to benefit from the appearance. She said it's the first time Country Day students will perform at the annual White House holiday concert, which draw top schools from around the country.

"It will make people aware of the arts program here," Collins said. "We already are well-known in academics and athletics. And, of course, for the children this is a once in a lifetime opportunity."

More than 1,400 pupils, many from Oakland County communities, attend pre-kindergarten



Make a note of it: Country Day music director Marilyn Collins helps soloist Katie Cavalieri reach difficult high notes during a run-through of "Panis Angelicus."

through the 12th grade at Country Day, a private school with four campuses (two in Bloomfield Hills, two in Beverly Hills).

**Don't expect Clinton**

Collins emphasized that the performance will be at a reception

for White House military personnel and their families, and not in front of a seated audience.

And will one of those walking through the East Room be President Bill Clinton? "I'm sure they're all hoping he walks in," said a realistic but hopeful Col-

lina.

Definitely not within earshot will be 15 parent chaperones, although they will be waiting outside the White House during the performance.

"They won't be going into the White House because of tight security," Collins said. "But they'll be on the bus outside."

Security precautions are also why the performance won't be videotaped or tape-recorded (only still photography will be allowed).

and why only 25 members of Country Day's 71-member choir will be making the two-day trip.

According to Collins, the top 25 students out of 61 (another 20 members declined the auditions) were picked after tryouts.

"The center group is going to sing," Collins said. "And the rest of you are going to freeze and watch like nothing's ever interested you more."

Near the end of a rehearsal, with fatigue creeping in, Collins asked her singers if they needed to practice standards such as "White Christmas." For several of the tunes, pupils waved the teacher on to the next page in her songbook.

(Staff writer Larry O'Connor contributed to this story.)

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