

Yankee

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stage due to a hurry-up to finish the scenery.

All art aspects of a Farmington Festival Theatre production are enhanced by the new-and-much-improved performing arts wing at FHS. Located adjacent to the stage on the school's southeastern corner, it is virtually a self-contained three times the size of its predecessor. Built with funds approved in the 1997 bond issue, it has an actual dressing room, rather than de-

signated fire halls where cast members had an assigned chair and small curtain for privacy. There is a vocal warmup room, eliminating the need for cast members to flock to common areas to practice. And the makeup room now is spacious and adequately lit.

"Before, our makeup room had yellow lighting," said student director/stage manager Devon Leigh, a senior.

And, said PHS teacher Leanne

Young — director, producer and choreographer for "Damn Yankees" which continues with 8 p.m. shows Friday and Saturday — a separate room for stage sets to be built enables everything to be done in a timely fashion, with no last-second surprises.

Room to work

"Before, we had to paint as the curtain opened," said Young, half-jokingly.

But there was no joking about how Leigh, Young and everybody else connected with the production view the performing arts center. Raves abounded prior to Monday's full dress rehearsal.

"Between scenes and stuff,

actors have all of this room to relax," said Leigh, a former FHS actor, while some of the 34 cast members awaited the rehearsal.

Student and crew member Patti Wheeler, in charge of the costuming department for the production, said the fact that there is an "actual dressing room instead of partitions and chairs down the hallway" gives participants a feeling they are really into something substantial and part of a production.

"I think it (the wing) is great because we're much more organized," said Wheeler. "It makes them feel like they are really in a production."

No longer scattered like the wind around the school, students working different elements of a production (behind-the-scenes crews and on-stage personnel) are able to work together and team up to benefit the so-called "company." Young explained.

"It unifies it," Young said. "Before we had to work at different locations, or at different times of the day because we couldn't occupy the same place. Last year, for 'Midsummer's Night Dream,' we took over the auditorium.

According to Young and high school instrumental music director (and auditorium manager) Norm Logan, as well as several students involved in their take on the George Abbott & Douglas Wallop book, the center simply helps them to feel like they are part of a professional-quality show.

Because facilities are more than adequate and much safer than they previously had been dealt with, Logan said students can really focus on the task at hand: Providing the audience with an outstanding performance.

The best part is we have the space to do right for the kids," Logan said, citing multiple rehearsal areas as one example.

"... It's a much more professional environment," one might encounter if they took on a career in performing arts.

Nearby, senior Matt Gwynn, who portrays the devil ("Mr. Applegate") in the production, wholeheartedly concurred.

"Before you had to battle the crowds" just to get costumes and makeup on in a timely fashion, Gwynn said. "It's much more organized. I'd probably still be putting on my makeup if I had to battle the crowds."

Transformation

There is no denying the wing's positive impact on helping the "Damn Yankees" cast and crew of 120 students (including musicians) prepare and rehearse. Monday afternoon's dress rehearsal went smoothly except for a few minor lighting and sound glitches.

In "Damn Yankees," lead character Joe Boyd sells his soul to Gwynn's character in order to help his beloved Senators defeat the dreaded New York Yankees. With Applegate's help, the middle-aged Boyd is transformed into an energetic star slugger.

But worries for the phantom player are just beginning, as audiences will witness tonight through Saturday.

Broadway musical selections (from "Annie" and music by Richard Adler and Jerry Ross, produced by special arrangement with Music Theatre International) include "You Gotta Have Heart" and "Shoeless Joe from Hannibal MO." For their agreement with Music Theatre International, Logan said, songs must be performed virtually note-for-note by students.

"Audiences will see for themselves that our productions are better," said Young about the performing arts center. She noted that the first performance at the new center was this fall's rendition of "Miracle Worker."

The center also is tangible proof of how highly Farmington Public Schools and the public it serves values the fine arts. Young emphasized, North Farmington High also opened up a similar center this year, with Harrison High School's to open in 2000-01.

"It's really encouraging to see that arts supported in the community, by the schools and everybody," she said. "We're so fortunate in this community that the arts are so valued."

Logan agreed, applauding the district for acknowledging that fine arts is the fastest-growing entertainment medium in the United States, according to ticket sales. "Farmington Public Schools has caught on to that trend by having really good fine arts facilities that will go way into this millennium."

Farmington High's new center is so well-thought of by the fine arts community, Logan continued, that it is being booked by professional groups as well. "The Scholars of London," a vocal ensemble quartet specializing in Madrigals, Motets, and British and International Folk Song arrangements, will perform a concert 7:30-9:30 p.m. Tuesday.

Performances of "Damn Yankees" are 8 p.m. Thursday, Friday and Saturday, Feb. 3-5, at the FHS auditorium. Tickets are \$8 for adults, \$7 for students (\$6 with a Gold Card). They will be on sale before and after high school hours and at the door. There will be assigned seating.



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SPEAKER: David J. Boor,
Senior Financial Consultant
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Getting ready: Set painting is accomplished by crew members Ellen Waisanen, Benjamin York and Amanda Patton.



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