

# Cedarville Teen Teaches Drama to Children as Extension of Drama Classes

By Amy Polk

A crash course in teaching drama to children has taught Emily Pieri a lot about herself and the production of plays.

The Cedarville teenager, a junior at Cedarville High School, is wrapping up the second part of a project she is completing to qualify for the highest award one can receive in Girl Scouts. She is teaching drama to about 30 elementary and middle school students through a program she designed called Act One and Act Two. Act One was a series of drama classes she taught last spring, and Act Two is directing and producing a play that will be presented this weekend, a dramatic rendition of the classic Lewis Carroll tale, Alice in Wonderland.

"I wasn't really sure I could do this with kids or have the patience, but I found out I could, and it opened some doors for me to the possibility of teaching," Miss Pieri said.

The daughter of Leroy and Lori Pieri of Cedarville, she has been working on this project since 2004, gathering information and deciding on her project and what skills she would cover in Act One and Act Two.

Usually acting in the plays she has performed in since age seven, Miss Pieri has now learned to do the job of eight to 10 people, drawing up a prop list, designing a set, communicating with parents and performers, creating a program, tickets, and posters, and publicizing the play all by herself. She has been rehearsing with the students one to two times a week since Christmas time.

"I don't think anyone realizes how much goes into this," said Lisa Dunn, a Cedarville director and actor who has produced or directed several local plays, and is the Les Cheneaux Community Schools drama teacher. "She did all the casting and blocking, which is not as easy as it looks."

Blocking is the task of putting actors in their positions and determining how they will move around the stage, Mrs. Dunn explained, and it was one of the skills Miss Pieri taught students of her drama class. Other skills covered included vocal projection, using one's body to project a character, lights and sound, costumes, and settings. Miss Pieri has honed her own acting and production skills through several years experience in the Les Cheneaux Education Foundation's summer musicals and through her education at Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp, where she went for orchestra. She also participated in a play as a child at Cheboygan Opera House, an experience that made a big impression on Miss Pieri, said her mother, Lori.

"She gave a really good overview of all the aspects of putting on a play," Mrs. Dunn added. "Emily has done this entire thing herself, from start to finish. She came to me with the idea, and she designed lesson plans and all the rest."

Miss Pieri was inspired to offer the children's drama program through her own love of the theater and an interest she spotted in some of the younger Girl Scouts in the local troop. "A lot of the kids expressed an interest in drama already, and some basically got a taste for it in the talent show last year. A lot of those kids are in this production," Miss Pieri said of a talent show fundraiser held last summer to raise money for the fifth grade's trip to Chicago.

Miss Pieri said she is fortunate to be working with so many "great kids," and with an advisor as experienced and helpful as Mrs. Dunn.

"There's really no one else better I could think of as far as working with kids," she said of seeking advice from Mrs. Dunn.

Mrs. Dunn said the program is something the school and community needed.

"I'm most grateful to her because she's cultivating drama students and the future actors of our drama program," Mrs. Dunn said. "It's something really lacking in our drama department."

She said the programs like Miss Pieri's are a model of what schools should be teaching students as part of a school drama program, and that previous dramatic instruction has been taught by example, and by simply putting on the play. She hopes Miss Pieri continues the class next year, and that someone continues to offer a drama program after Miss Pieri is graduated from Cedarville High.



The cast of Alice in Wonderland, with some in costumes, takes a break from rehearsal Wednesday, January 31, in the cafeteria at Les Cheneaux Community Schools in Cedarville. They will perform this weekend Saturday, February 10, and Sunday, February 11.

At left, Emily Pieri (right) reviews costume information with her cast Wednesday, January 31, before the upcoming production of Alice in Wonderland. With her is assistant Nicole Yeager (left) and a member of the cast, Jordan Chisholm (bottom, left).



During an instruction session earlier this year, Emily Pieri discusses acting tips with some of her young cast of fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students.

"If you take a college class or go to Blue Lake [Fine Arts Camp], you would learn through the approach that Emily's teaching," Mrs. Dunn said. "This has been really enjoyable for me to watch her skills evolve, and it reminded me of the feeling I got when I first started directing. The director starts out nervous, but eventually ends up having fun and being creative."

Miss Pieri attributes the "fun" to her cast of fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students, whom she said have been enjoyable to work with and eager learners.

"I love all these kids," she said. "They are a really great bunch of kids, and it was so hard for me to cast them, but the most important thing for me is for them to like it and have fun doing it."

Alice in Wonderland will be presented at the Old Gymnasium at Les Cheneaux Community Schools in Cedarville, Saturday, February 10, and Sunday, February 11. The play will be Saturday at 7 p.m. and Sunday at 3 p.m. Profits from the play will be donated to the Les Cheneaux fifth grade class trip to Chicago, and tickets will be sold at the door. Tickets are \$3 for students and children, and \$5 for adults.

The cast includes Maddisen Cardwell as Lewis Carroll; Alexis Lynn Barr as Alice One; Heather Lindberg as Alice Two; Kelley Wright as Alice Three; Shannon Sayles as Alice Four; Holly Lysinger as Alice Five; Ariane Elise DeRosha as the Blue Storyteller; Grace Dunn as the Green Storyteller; Jordan Chisholm as the Red

Storyteller; Taylor Perkins as the Orange Storyteller; Isabel Brumleve as the Purple Storyteller; Maddie Kohlmann as the White Rabbit; Hope Nightlinger as the Caterpillar; Kayla A. Merchberger as the Pigeon; Ashley Sherlund as Pete; Janaan Meyers as Pat; Paige Kanitz as the Chesire Cat; Gretchen Spencer as the Mad Hatter; Cara Hakola as the Doormouse; Monica Krackowski as the March Hare; Cole Diehl as a Deuce; Gabe Miller as an ace; Kelly Plank as a four card; Bekah Miller as the Queen, and Sarah Landreville as Hedgehog. Cynthia Barowski, Ashlee Mielke, Madi Kroger, and Dustin Bellman are part of the full company working on sets, crew, or chorus.

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