

FACE PAIN?



Ramapo Indian Hills parents are back in school to ham it up

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The opening number of school parents' FLOW musical comedy at Ramapo High School in Franklin Lakes on Sunday, which helped raise scholarship money.

FRANKLIN LAKES — In their Snow White, Pinocchio and Rapunzel costumes, they sang, gesticulated, pranced, screeched in falsetto and danced to Meghan Trainor's "All About That Bass" before a 350-member audience in the Ramapo High School auditorium.

If they were theater kids, it had been once upon a time, because these performers were not students. They were parents of students.

In its 29 years, the parent-run "FLOW Follies" production has raised more than \$600,000 in scholarship money for graduating seniors in the Ramapo Indian Hills Regional High School District's two schools. In the process, it has brought together disparate community members, from restless children running between the aisles to older residents who had been embroidering before they came.

It has also drawn parent volunteers closer. "People come here as strangers and they leave here as family," said Curt Buckler, the director.

The production changes every year. This year's show, performed on Friday, Saturday and Sunday before a total audience of 750, began with a rendition of "Let It Go" from the Disney movie "Frozen" — but with new lyrics: "Let it FLOW, let it FLOW, let the energy overflow."

Over the next two hours, the parents delivered.

A laugh line: Rapunzel (played by a mother of two high school students) saying she invited Snow White for dinner and adding, "I made her apple pie."

The audience also chuckled when Cinderella had boxes of Jimmy Choo and Louis Vuitton shoes delivered by a UPS delivery woman.

The plays are entirely the creation of parents, Buckler said. They begin writing the script in May, hold auditions in November and begin meeting in January from 7 to 9 p.m. three or four times a week to practice, he said. They also make the costumes, build and paint sets, and take charge of marketing.

"They give up pretty much their life beginning in January," said Linda Schwager, the Oakland mayor, explaining why she limited her participation to a small role as bailiff. She was more involved when her son, now 39, was in school and she would organize cast parties, she said.

The money raised from the shows goes to 56 graduating seniors from Ramapo High in Franklin Lakes and Indian Hills High School in Oakland.

For a student to be eligible to apply, his or her family must become members by donating \$30 or show need by providing the “proof of financial aid supplement.” A committee of faculty and administration selects recipients, who each receive \$750 for college.

In the audience on Sunday were dozens of senior citizens, who had arrived an hour earlier and were served a free lunch of burritos, salads, chicken Parmesan and meatballs. They also paid a discounted \$10 price instead of \$15.

“I love it, get out of the house,” said Martha Mennella, 87, who was attending for the fourth year.

She was accompanied by her neighbors, Eleanor Van Der Plaats, 83, and Gladys Diezel, 80. “I’m the designated driver, just in case,” Mennella joked.

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