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'Wish Upon a Star' Turns 10

By Cathy Dausman



Photos provided

"young and younger ... tremendously important lessons" about themselves, their talent and responsibility to their community.

Proceeds from the shows benefit UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital as well as other organizations such as the Make-A-Wish Foundation. PPF expects to raise more than \$10,000 this year, says board of directors member Gina Campo. To date Campo says the children's hospital has received \$139,500 from the foundation.

The "Wish Upon a Star" cast is filled with repeat performers. Veteran Sierra Dee says it was watching young members grow up that kept her coming back year after year, first as a performer in the original show, and now as the show's musical director.

Campolindo High School junior Josh Christian (who plays Hercules) is in his ninth year with PPF. High school senior Jordan Ben-Shmuel (one of several Peter Pans) says PPF "has been a huge part of my family's life for eight years." Three young Welch family performers, ages 14 and under, are appearing for the fifth year in various "Wish Upon a Star" casts; they are joined this year by their 4-year-old sibling, who plays a dwarf.

PPF inspires longtime loyalty on many levels. Adult performer Charlotta Ryge, mother of the original Peter Pan Steffen Ryge, steps onstage for the first time as Sleeping Beauty's nemesis, Malificent. The elder Ryge, who has served on the PPF board of directors since 2012, has watched the show evolve from its very beginning, when Noel wrote the role of Peter Pan for Steffen. She recalls how her son was affected by his cast visit to the children's hospital and believes in the importance of the PPF motto, both for its philanthropic good deeds and for "teaching young hearts to fly."

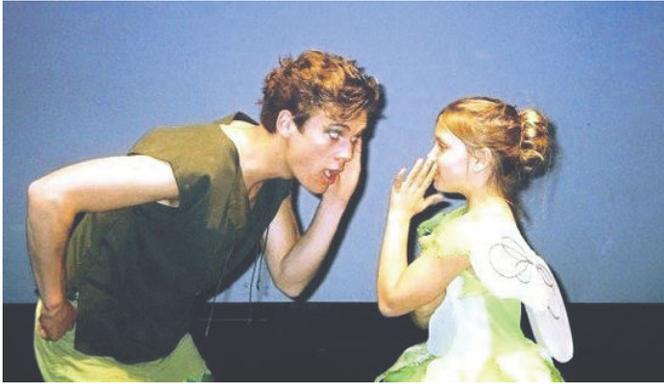
Perhaps best known for its "Wish Upon a Star" production, PPF also performs summer and winter musicals; cast members have performed for audiences at the Walnut Creek ice rink, in San Francisco's Union Square, and during Orinda's Fourth of July parade.

"The Peter Pan Foundation, inspired by our original Peter Pan, the late Steffen Ryge, was founded to

inspire children of all ages to find their inner talents and confidence; to help them to reach their personal potential and find the best versions of themselves, on and off the stage," says Noel.

After all, she says, "everyone has a little Peter Pan inside."

The 10th anniversary production of "Wish Upon a Star" runs May 28, 29 and 30 at the DVC Performing Arts Center, 321 Golf Club Road, Pleasant Hill, with full-length performances at 2 and 7 p.m. Shadow Cast performances tailored to younger audiences begin at 10 a.m. May 29 and 30. Tickets are \$25 for adults and \$15 for students and may be purchased online at www.peterpanfoundation.org.



Pictured above is Steffen Ryge, the original Peter Pan.



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