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Summer performing-arts camp in Clinton inspires youths' potential

TAROTÉ proceeds benefit student scholarships

By Mimi Liu, Staff Writer

Tarsha Proctor Standridge has not forgotten her roots.

Every year for the past four years, the former Clinton resident and 1992 graduate of Suitland High School has made the trip from Los Angeles to Prince George's County to run a performing arts summer camp called the Prince George's Players Academy for local-area youths.

The summer camp, one of the programs offered by Standridge's Clinton-based nonprofit organization TAROTÉ, which stands for The Arts Reaching Out Through Education, is in its eighth year and presented the Players Academy's production, "Beyond the Test!" on Friday and Saturday at Bishop McNamara High School in Forestville.

The nonprofit also operates a Los Angeles Players Academy.

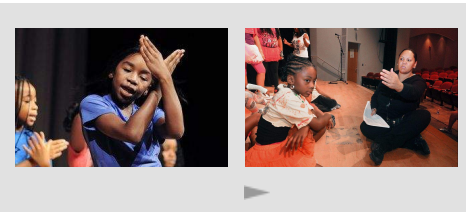
The original performance showcases songs and dances from 35 children ages 5-17 in Prince George's and Washington, D.C.

Parent volunteer Leigh-Leigh Dowdy of Mount Rainier watched in amazement July 27 at the school's auditorium as her two children, Leighmon Dowdy-Wilson, 14, and Aleigha Dowdy-Wilson, 12, rehearsed a hip-hop routine on stage.

For Dowdy, the production was more than just a summer activity that entertained her kids: it was a life-altering



Greg Dohler/The Gazette Nia Smith, 10, of Accokeek strikes a dance pose along with other performers July 28 during rehearsal of the musical show, "Beyond the Test," at Bishop McNamara High School in Upper Marlboro. The production, held Friday and Saturday, was part of a performing arts workshop for youth held by TAROTÉ Players Academy.



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experience for them.

"My son and daughter have become two different people," she said. "This program has completely boosted their self-

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...esteem over 100 percent, and got them organized and responsible.”

Standridge said proceeds from TAROTÉ's shows cover the program expenses for some of the students who qualify as low-income. She said this year, about half of the students had been accepted for scholarships to attend the summer camp.

“I don't want to see any kids turned away especially if they would have had something to do during the summer and they couldn't because of money,” she said.

TAROTÉ also awards a college scholarship to one selected Prince George's girl and boy each year. Standridge said scholarship amounts range anywhere between \$500 to \$1,000. The winners are announced in August.

Anthony Howard, 13, of Temple Hills, who participated in last year's Players Academy production, said this year's show was challenging because the students had to learn different dances such as hip-hop, swing, step and tap, in addition to honing their singing and acting skills.

“It's fun,” he said. “We're gaining a lot of new skills, and the talent just gets better.”

The cost to participate in the program is \$325. Rehearsals are held at Bishop McNamara from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. five days a week for three to four weeks straight during the summer.

Students also participate in daily lectures on acting techniques, networking strategies, the entertainment business and film theory from university professors.

Howard said he likes the theme for the show: youths play students who did not perform well during the school year and must take remedial classes in the summer. The show also teaches lessons on bullying and integrity and encourages students to stay in school to pursue higher education.

Dowdy said she will be sad to see the summer camp conclude after this weekend, but said she will enroll her kids for next summer's production.

“When the curtain calls on Saturday night, I will shed a tear,” she said.

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