

VACT puts on 'Hairspray'

KIMBERLY WETHAL
Unified Newspaper Group

The Verona Area Community Theater is putting on the musical "Hairspray" from April 26-28.

The show, VACT's ninth all-teen production, features 99 students from 17 different schools around the area. Two Verona Area High School students, Derek Argall and Jacob Connor, have lead roles in the musical.

The musical, set in 1960s Baltimore, tells the story of teenager Tracy Turnblad and her dream to dance on the all-white "Corny Collins Show." Despite being considered "plus-sized," Turnblad is still chosen to dance on the show and further helps to integrate African-American dancers into the show.

VACT's production is being directed by Alyssa Dvorak.

The show will run each of the three nights at 7:30 p.m. at the Verona Area High School Performing Arts Center, 300 Richard St., with a Sunday afternoon performance at 2 p.m. April 28.

Tickets are \$17 for general admission or \$12 for students and seniors older than 65.

For more information, visit vact.org.

Email Unified Newspaper Group reporter Kimberly Wethal at kimberly.wethal@wcinet.com.

If You Go

What: VACT musical "Hairspray"
When: 7:30 p.m. April 26-28, 2 p.m. April 28
Where: Verona Area High School Performing Arts Center, 300 Richard St.
Info: Visit vact.org



Loeah Johnson, left, plays Tracy Turnblad, with Olivia Foght as Amber Von Tussle in the upcoming Verona Area Community Theater production of "Hairspray." Photo submitted

Udelhofen benefit expands in year 2

April 28 event will raise money for Carbone center, Make-A-Wish

SCOTT GIRARD
Unified Newspaper Group

April 28 would be Katie Udelhofen's 34th birthday.

While the 2002 Verona Area High School graduate, who died in July 2016 after a year battling leukemia, won't be around to see it, her family and friends are trying to use the celebration to help "other Katies that are going to be diagnosed."

The second year of Katie's Birthday Benefit, at The Brink Lounge in Madison from 6 to 10 p.m., will raise funds for UW's Carbone Cancer Center and the Make-A-Wish Foundation. While it will be similar to last year's event that featured music, auctions and a celebration of Katie, Susan Udelhofen said this year's event is also focused on honoring others who have fought cancer.

"Of course we're doing it because Katie was our daughter and she died of cancer, but it's also what do we do now ... to reach others that are struggling with this or have struggled?" Susan told the Press. "We want to honor those people that night as well."

The efforts to honor Katie have already raised funds this year in Verona with a meat raffle, 10 percent night at Culver's and



Katie Udelhofen-Clark, who grew up in Fitchburg, is pictured here with her daughter, Grace Elizabeth. Photo submitted

informational table at Miller and Sons Supermarket this past Saturday.

"There's all these people that have been incredibly supportive in Verona," Susan said.

But they're hoping to continue that with ticket sales — \$25 in advance, \$30 at the door — for the event and auction sales there. Items to be auctioned include tickets to UW athletic events, Bo Ryan- and Greg Gard-autographed basketballs, artwork, local business gift certificates and vacation packages.

Susan encouraged people to purchase tickets in advance, as there is a capacity of 400 at the event and they want to be sure everyone who is interested in coming knows they can come. Tickets can be purchased at webelieveinkatie.com.

On hand at the event will be Jenna Acker, who received the first Katie Udelhofen scholarship last year as she graduated from VAHS,

and the child who received a trip to Disney World through the donation to the Make-A-Wish foundation.

"This is really important to say, 'Our little event last year, look who we touched,'" Susan said.

The scholarship is set to go to VAHS graduates for at least the next 14 years. They are also donating the Carbone Center this year, Susan explained, because of the excellent work they've seen there — including research that would have helped Katie.

"Katie's prognosis would be different if she were diagnosed now," Susan said. "They just know so much more."

While that's "obviously very bittersweet" for she and her husband John, it also gives them "motivation to do even more," Susan said, and helps them recognize that efforts similar to their own probably benefited Katie three or four years ago — giving her an extra six months to live.

If You Go

What: Katie's Birthday Benefit
When: 6-10 p.m. Saturday, April 28
Where: The Brink Lounge, 701 E. Washington Ave., Madison
Tickets: \$25 advance, \$30 at the door
Info: webelieveinkatie.com

"How do we take this and pay it forward and hopefully help somebody else?" Susan said.

She said the committee working on the event and the We Believe in Katie nonprofit that was established in her honor has been extremely helpful, and the interest from community members about Katie's story has been heartwarming, even as they miss her "every single day."

"We're also finding how good people are, how generous and kind," Susan said. "That's a gift, too."

Contact Scott Girard at ungreporter@wcinet.com and follow him on Twitter @sgirard9.

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ROMEO comes to Verona April 20

HELU WANG
Unified Newspaper Group

Dennis Jenkyns got an idea to start a support group for retired people during a coffee time with friends at Tuvalu Coffee House. He visions the group as "cordial" and "neighborly" focusing on productive conversation.

The first meeting will be held at 9:30 a.m. Friday, April 20, at Tuvalu Coffee House and Gallery, 200 S. Main St., where retired people can get mental support by chatting with people who share the same experience.

"Having friends and socializing adds quality to aging process," Jenkyns said.

Through his prior experience of attending the Retired Older Men Eating Out group in Monona and McFarland, Jenkyns found out how helpful the gathering was to the seniors. The same group of people got together every month. For some of them, the group meeting was the only social activity after their retirement.

Jenkyns doesn't have

If You Go

What: Retired Older Men Eating Out
When: 9:30 a.m. Friday, April 20
Where: Tuvalu Coffee House and Gallery, 200 S. Main St.
Info: jenkyns@charter.net

a clue about how the first meeting will go, but he sees it as just a group of people hanging out and chatting. He would avoid controversial topics and start the conversation with simple questions like "what's your first job?"

"It doesn't matter what we are talking about, but to engage everyone in the conversation," Jenkyns said. "Once they have fun, they just keep coming."

Future plans of how the group meeting will proceed will depend on group members' needs, suggestions and feedback.

For information, call Jenkyns at 221-8416 or email jenkyns@charter.net.

Track and field holds Fun Run

The Verona Area High School boys track and field team is hoping some community members like running just as much as they do.

The team is hosting a community fun run for all ages this Saturday, April 21, with the race beginning at 10 a.m. Registration and race number pick up will begin at 9 a.m. at the VAHS track.

Day of race registration for both the 5K run/walk and the 1-mile distance is \$20.

While there will be a clock at the finish line "so you can try for a personal best," the event website

If You Go

What: Boys track and field fun run
When: 10 a.m. Saturday, April 21; registration at 9 a.m.
Where: VAHS track, 300 Richard St.
Info: veronatrackandfield.com/funrun

says, there are no awards or official timing.

The event raises money for the boys' track and field team.

— Scott Girard

FFA begins food drive

Verona's Future Farmers of America chapter is bringing its food drive to you this year.

The group's "reverse food drive" for Badger Prairie Needs Network was expected to begin Wednesday, April 18, as members will drop bags off around the community for people to fill. They will then return to pick them up on April 25.

There will also be a drop-off at Miller and Sons Supermarket the whole

week, and FFA members will be at the store from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, April 21, with a list of items BPNN is looking for.

Those items, FFA member Kelsey Last wrote in an email, are: apricots, diced tomatoes, tuna or other canned meat, whole wheat spaghetti, brown rice, dry black beans, oatmeal or cereal, spaghetti sauce, mayonnaise or salad dressing and dish soap.

— Scott Girard

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