Capital Region Gives: Cultivating passion to excel in the arts

NYSSSA celebrates 45 years with PBS’ “Creative Summer”

By Jennifer Patterson
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When Sara Fittizzi talks about the arts, her passion is palpable.

Fittizzi is the executive director of the New York State Summer School of the Arts, a program supported and administered by the state Education Department. Comprised of seven schools, NYSSSA offers four-week residential training programs each summer in ballet,
No testimony Monday at trial of man accused of killing son

At least the weekend was sunny

Cuomo could reshape court

Celebrating its 45th anniversary this year, NYSSSA partnered with Mountain Lake PBS in Plattsburgh to produce a documentary titled "New York Youth: Creative Summer," which focuses on high school students who devote part of their summer vacation to a month of intensive study.

"This short documentary will give viewers an inside look at what it takes to excel in the arts," said Fittizzi, who is active in local community theater. "It's an opportunity to witness some of the greatest artists in their respective fields generously sharing their gifts with the next generation of young talent."

Mountain Lake PBS launched a Kickstarter campaign last month — open through June 12 — to raise $10,000 for production costs. Mountain Lake is one of 10 regional nonprofit PBS stations across the state.

Filming began over the winter when cameras captured students auditioning for this summer's residencies. The documentary will follow these students from auditions through performances held at the conclusion of the program.

More than 400 teens will study this summer at NYSSSA schools at Skidmore College and SUNY campuses in Fredonia, Oswego and Delhi.

"Watching these extremely motivated and creative teens reaching high for a career in the arts has inspired me this year," said Paul Larson, arts producer at Mountain Lake PBS. "If given the chance to tell their story, their ambition will no doubt inspire countless others as well."

NYSSSA partners with teachers, artists, performing arts companies and venues like the New York City Ballet, Philadelphia Orchestra, Saratoga Performing Arts Center and the Chautauqua Institution.

One such collaborator is John Astin, an Academy Award-nominated actor who portrayed Gomez Addams on "The Addams Family." He conducts comedy workshops with students in the theatre program.

By immersing themselves in a community of like-minded peers, faculty and staff, students get a true sense of what it takes to be a professional artist. They experience the rigors of their chosen arts field, working in small groups with instructors and one-on-one with professionals in their discipline.

NYSSSA is open to all high school students (the ballet program accepts applications beginning in sixth grade) who are accepted through a competitive audition and judging process each winter.

Tuition for the program is $2,100 and includes the program, room/board and supplies. Assistance is available for students with financial need.

Fittizzi hopes that once produced, the documentary will be screened by PBS television stations statewide. "We're hopeful that it will be picked up due to the broad nature of the program and the fact that students participate throughout the state," Fittizzi said. "It's one thing to talk about what we offer, but it's totally different to see these kids and experience their talent, drive and dedication. They blow me away."

For information, go to http://www.oce.nysed.gov/nysssa

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Help fund arts documentary

Go to https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/350228129/new-york-youth-creative-summer by June 12 to help PBS and NYSSSA produce their film.