



Izzy Cobelski, right, helps a classmate with a costuming lesson. Izzy's experience in theater has been a confidence builder. AMANDA THOMPSON

Behind the scenes

SAIL theater students build people skills along with sets and costumes

Amanda Karioth Thompson Council on Culture & Arts

‘I’m going to teach you the four-in-hand knot. If you master that one, we’ll move on to the half Windsor, the full Windsor or the Pratt knot,’ Sierra Service said as she passed around a bin of neckties. It’s an unusual lesson not often seen in high school classes, unless the class is theater technology and the unit is costuming.

Service is the director of the drama program at SAIL High School and, along with her traditional drama classes and club, she has recently developed a theater technology course.

Students learn about stage management, sets, props, costumes, make-up, lights, sound and more. “The goal is for everyone to have a taste of everything and, when they see what they’re most interested in, they can tailor their projects to that,” said Service.

See **THEATER**, Page 4B



SAIL 12th-grader Cameron Erskine uses a handsaw purchased with grant funds from COCA. SIERRA SERVICE

Theater

Continued from Page 1B

For the past two years, Service has applied for and received an Art Education Grant from the Council on Culture & Arts. With the grant funds, she's been able to build a collection of tools for her students to use in building sets and props for school functions, festivals and performances.

Before they begin, students all learn how to use the tools safely. For that lesson, Service brings in her father, Steve Service who has worked in construction and as a home inspector. "He was talking to the class about safety. He had this fake thumb on and pretended to cut his thumb. It's a 'dad joke' but it really made an impact," she laughed.

This year, students mounted a production of "Arsenic and Old Lace," a complex show with period costumes and an elaborate set. For this and all other shows, students do their own research and develop production concepts for Service's approval.

"It's the same as in a theater where you'd have a team of designers who

come up with ideas and present them to the director. In this case, the director is me. I'll take their ideas, give them feedback and we'll figure out what we can make happen," explained Service.

Students are encouraged to consider the cost of materials, timelines and possible construction challenges. This process teaches a variety of skills including "accountability and teamwork," said Service. "Also, realizing that you may think you know how to do something but other people with more knowledge and experience might have some good advice that might help. Being able to accept that and adapt is important."

Cameron Erskine, is a 12th grader and, in his final year of high school, he decided to give both drama and theater technology a try. "I like being onstage, but I also like building the sets," he said. Cameron has learned that his work must have structural integrity for the sake of the production's narrative and the safety of the actors. "Whatever you build, you have to know that it works properly and understand the abuse that it'll take during scenes. It would be pretty bad if an entire wall fell down."

Like her classmate Cameron, Izzy Co-



Sierra Service helps a theater tech student tie a four-in-hand knot.

AMANDA THOMPSON

belski is also comfortable in the limelight as well as behind the scenes. "I've been onstage, done hair and makeup and costuming, set building, painting, a little bit of everything, really" the 12th

grader said.

"A lot of my people skills have come from theater. I had a stutter and it still come out sometimes but it comes out a lot less as I've been working in the theater and building up my confidence. All the knowledge I've acquired through the theater, the pushing forward, pushing through, those are skills that are going to help me for the rest of my life."

That's exactly what Service hopes her students gain from their experience with her theater technology class. "A lot of students love the idea of theater and not all of them are super ready to be on stage. It scares some of them and for those who are really into it, theater tech is a more viable place to find career opportunities," she explained.

"Being a successful actor is not easy, so if you have a second skill, it makes you very valuable. If you know how to build sets or sew costumes or stage manage, it's an excellent foot in the door to the theater world. There are more options behind the scenes."

Amanda Karioth Thompson is the Interim Executive Director for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).