



SCHOOL & FAMILY

# CELEBRATING STUDENT TALENT

The Leon County Schools Arts & Music Fest showcases work from 30 schools

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COUNCIL ON CULTURE & ARTS

**H**undreds gathered this weekend to enjoy the Leon County Schools Arts & Music Fest, an event that celebrated the talents of our local arts teachers and students. More than 30 schools took over Kleman Plaza and offered performances on three stages and a pop-up art gallery featuring more than 90 piece of artwork. The literary arts also factored into the festival and 270 parents spent time reading with their kids.

The Fairview Middle School jazz band, one of the featured ensembles, played for an enthusiastic crowd. Devan Moore, the Fairview band and orchestra director, was beaming after her students' performance. "They play exciting music that everybody can bob their head to, tap their toes to, and dance if they need to." Moore is eager to see what the future holds for the 18 students in the jazz band. "I know of a couple of students have already expressed interest in

pursuing music beyond secondary education, so that means I'm doing something right and it makes me feel good."

After carefully packing up their instruments, several of the musicians wanted to share their thoughts about the experience and reflect on what they'd just accomplished. Eighth-grader Taylor Haworth appreciated the audience and enjoyed "being out in public and having people listen and stop to pay attention to you. It's really cool to be able to see yourself pulling new people into the music world." Eighth-grader Mia Moldenhauer was nervous about her solo but acknowledged that performances like these "build your self-confidence because you can perform in front of a lot of people, it helps you get over the fear. It makes me want more because I know I can do it."

The students all agreed that they wanted more time to study music. Seventh-grader Dominique Clark is excited about being in the ensemble next year, and eighth-grader Julian Lee-Sursin is looking forward to the high school music offerings. "I play bass and guitar, and the guitar teacher at the school I'm zoned for is really good. I'm also



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Leon's Lion Steel band performs.

looking forward to chorus because my voice is dropping." Siddhi Kondapalli is actively exploring. "I'm going to keep trying new instruments because music is always fun. I want to try the ocarina, it's like a flute but instead of it being long, it's like a round sphere that has holes on it."

See Festival, Page 2C

# Festival

Continued from Page 1C

Lesanu Haile attended the event with his two sons, both students at Astoria Park Elementary School. They spent time in the pop-up art gallery, looking at the exhibit coordinated and produced by the Council on Culture & Arts. "I love my kids to get some of this experience because art is everything in this world. My kids are enjoying the exhibition, they're still in there looking." As with all its public art exhibitions, COCA designed an exhibit treasure hunt to encourage gallery goers to look more closely at the work.

Teamwork was a common thread throughout the event. Not only did individuals and community organizations lend their expertise and support but students also highlighted the spirit of cooperation through their chosen medium, whether it was a peace mural, songs in four part harmony, choreography, or dramatic offerings.

Cobb Middle School drama students and sisters, Mary and Lydia Neel, have learned a lot about teamwork and encouraging each other. Cobb presented several different numbers from its spring musical. "Even though we basically know it by heart there's still nerves," eighth-grader Mary said. "To overcome the nerves, we usually do an energy circle. It's kind of like a meditation. We get in a giant circle and ..." her voice trails off, and seventh-grader Lydia continues: "You close your eyes and hold hands. Ms. Meis, our teacher, squeezes a hand and then that person squeezes the hand that's next to them and it goes around the circle." Mary added, "It makes me feel like we're all one



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The Fairview jazz ensemble performs.

unit."

The girls believe that one of the most valuable things they've learned through their theater training is self-control. "You might not like this person or their idea but they're part of your team," Mary said. "You've got to include everyone, it's not just you." Lydia added: "Even if you don't like them, it might be that you just don't know them. When you get to know them you may like them a lot."

Twelfth-grader Mason Ballard has spent four years getting to know her fellow Leon High School vocalists. She got involved with chorus before she began ninth grade and since then has participated in several of the school's choral ensembles. Now a singer in the Madrigals group, Mason is gaining impressive performance experience. "We're one of the top audition choirs and we're a chamber choir so we do a lot of gigs." As a senior, she is off to FSU next year and, though she isn't sure what she wants to study yet, she insisted "there's no way that I

could continue my life without music being some part of it." Reflecting on her years of music training, Mason credited her teacher, Judy Arthur, who will retire this year after nearly 40 years of teaching. "I love Dr. Arthur, she's such a good director, she knows what she's doing and she knows how to make us grow as singers and people because she cares about us in that way."

The Arts & Music Fest made one thing very clear: The arts teachers in our school district all care deeply about their students. They are specialists in their fields and while they offer expert instruction on topics such as musicality, elements of design and improvisation, they are also committed to teaching much more than technique. These educators understand the challenges their student will be presented with as adults. Participation in school arts programs is a way to help students gain the skills they need to move forward as successful people, no matter where their paths may lead.