

The Pyramid Experience

September 2009

Tallahassee, Florida

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Tallahassee Dancers A Hit At The Moon

Pyramid Tallahassee's talented dancers joined Pyramid Studios performers in mid-August to dazzle a crowd of 1,000 at The Moon.

Under the direction of dance instructor **Danya Davis**, and decked out in incredible costumes created by Director **Lana Smith**, the dancers drew huge applause from the audience.

In addition, Pyramid Tallahassee artists contributed original art, prints and jewelry to perhaps the most interesting art exhibit ever.

"Under the leadership of Visual Arts Coordinator **Maureen Raftery** and Performing Arts Instructor **Danny Wood**, the Tallahassee arts program has exploded," said Pyramid Arts Coordinator **Bill Fuller**. "The talent at Tallahassee is exceptional."

Already this year, Tallahassee's Players have put on a tremendous outdoor concert, performed with a local band at the American Legion Hall and showed their talents in several other venues.

Mary Ann Sanderford was the emcee for the Moon performance. The dancers included **Derrick Grimsley, Marsha Richardson, Leo Nix, Marcus Miller, Merrill Diggs and Tim Poole**.



Brilliantly costumed dancers delivered a tight crowd-pleasing routine during the summer show.

The musical comedy, *Ritmo's Love Story*, was conceived and written by The Players of Pyramid Studios. More than 40 performers from Studios, Tallahassee and Pensacola Pyramids displayed their talent on stage. They were backed by seven community jazz instrumentalists.

"This was the most ambitious and entertaining performance yet," said **Christa Saunders**, the show director.

With the help of several Pyramid Tallahassee family members, the show was a financial success as well. Underwriters, advertisers, donors, silent-auction purchasers and art patrons ensured that the performance was paid for, and the costs of Pyramid's arts program defrayed.

Pyramid Receptionist Spreads Her Wings

By Eric L. Brown
Program Coordinator

Rebecca Roberts is willing to try anything — and excels at everything she tries.

Ms. Roberts answers a multi-lined telephone system, directs calls appropriately, forwards calls to voice mail boxes and takes messages.

She is also the first face visitors encounter when they enter the office.

This is one of the most important portions of her responsibilities, as Ms. Roberts is a greeter to visitors as well as the staff and other students.

In addition to her skills, her personality has helped her become an exceptional receptionist.

She also provides assistance to visitors when completing the in/out logbook and ensures that it is completed correctly.



Ms. Roberts

Perhaps the most overlooked aspect of Ms. Roberts' daily endeavors is the assistance she provides to other students to operate the vending machines.

"It is fun to work in the office," Ms. Roberts said, "listening to the music class and seeing everyone who comes."

Ms. Roberts is also an active member of the music class. She is working towards increasing her ability to play keyboards and showcasing her singing talents.

"I would like to learn to play keyboards independently," she said, "without my instructor pacing me."

Ms. Roberts said her ultimate goal for this year is to perform in the fall showcase at Pyra-

mid Tallahassee on October 17.

With all that Ms. Roberts has been working on, she has decided to accept an additional task — assisting in the development of the Independent Studies Campus Paper. The concept is to have a compilation of student written articles to be distributed on the campus.

Ms. Roberts has been instrumental in recruiting students for articles, formatting articles, writing articles, suggesting ideas and assisting others to type the information into the computer. Ms. Roberts also has displayed her talents as an interviewer.

Ms. Roberts has volunteered to be the paper's editor. Ms. Roberts said that she enjoys helping others and is really excited about the Campus Paper.

Troopers Visit Pyramid Again

The current Florida Highway Patrol recruiting class visited Pyramid in September.

The objective was to educate Pyramid students regarding law enforcement, and familiarize soon-to-be troopers

with disability issues.

Pyramid dancers and the rock band entertained the visitors, who responded with a close-order drill accompanied by sing-song cadences.

Parents Deserve Our Utmost Respect

**By Lana Smith
Director**

Many of us are blessed to be parents. If you are a parent, you know the sacrifice and selflessness it takes to rear children.

This is an admirable task but is in no way comparable to the commitment of parents of children with developmental disabilities who I meet every day.

It is difficult for me to describe my experiences through the years with these parents. I have seen them struggle through so many things such as frustrating social security and med-waiver guidelines and endless meetings about medical and behavioral issues.

It always struck me how invasive things can be for these parents. Being a private person myself, I can not imagine having so many people in and out of my home and knowing that everyone knows my business.

This year, two mothers in particular have pulled on my heartstrings with their struggles.

While their stories are particularly heart-rending, they are perhaps representative of the struggles most parents of people with developmental difficulties live with every day to one degree or another.

One mother recently lost her son. He was wheelchair bound, non-verbal, and cognitively challenged.

This woman dedicated 35 years of her life to



Ms. Smith

taking care of her son in her home. The daily commitment far exceeds the demands of a full time job.

When she lost her son, I can't describe the agony on her face.

The other who has impacted me especially this year is battling for her son's life. Her son is 40 years old, severely autistic, mostly non-verbal and cognitively challenged.

This mom is committed to not just making sure her son is taken care of physically but shows her love and commitment by taking him out and making him a part of his community as well as helping him to build relationships with family and friends.

Over the past year her son has started to rapidly lose weight and develop unexplainable physical ailments.

Her struggle to unlock his medical mysteries has been grueling, heartbreaking and at times unbearable. She and her son have endured constant doctor's appointments, tests and scans, but so far to no avail.

I have often told family, friends and co-workers that I can not imagine having a child with a developmental disability. I know all parents have their trials but I find myself blessed when I can complain about curfews, the occasional groundings and a bad grade on a report card.

To all of our Pyramid parents, you have my utmost respect. You are selfless and inspire me.

You are what I don't think I could ever be.

Student Works To Master Bass Guitar

By Danny Woods
Performing Arts Instructor

A Pyramid Tallahassee student is mastering the bass guitar.

Blake Russell, a soft-spoken man, has blossomed in music class. At one point, it was a victory for him just to join with the class in group singing or class warm-ups. Now, Mr. Russell shows up early and eagerly participates.

“He’s improved his posture, gotten better at getting off the wall,” said student performer **Nate Sailor**, a consummate musician himself. “And he’s



Blake Russell practices riffs on the bass guitar.

learning the notes better, one step at a time.”

Mr. Russell began his instrument studies two years ago on

the keyboard, but seven months ago picked up the bass guitar and hasn’t looked back.

He plays clearly, learns new songs with impressive speed, and even sings along on some songs. He now has the bass lines for 10 songs committed to memory with four more on the way.

On Wednesdays, he plays along with Mr. Sailor, a gifted drummer/singer. On Fridays, they are joined on guitar by **John Madden**, the third musician of the Tallahassee Pyramid Rock and Roll band.

Dance Ensemble Creates Varied Repertoire

Danya Davis, our dance instructor, has been cooking up some hot new dances.

Her students, including new dancers **Sunne Couver, Amy Kirkland, Gussie Walker and Merrill Diggs**, are working on an ensemble dance number set to the Beyonce song, “Single Ladies.”

“I like that song, Ms. Couver said. “Amy, Gussie and

Merrill did a good job today.”

Ms. Davis, who incorporates a wide variety of influences into her dance classes, says, “we combine old school, new school, and original movements created by the dancers themselves.”

Every dance is different, because all the choreography includes sections created by her students. If a student shines at a particular move or

dance, it is a safe bet that it will end up in the repertoire.

This eclecticism was displayed in our spring showcase, where student dancers dazzled the crowd with an energetic hip hop performance.

Another dance debuted in a spectacular act at The Moon in August, and others will be introduced at the Oct. 17 Fall Showcase.

First Outdoor Show Was A Big Success

By Danny Wood
Performing Arts
Instructor

In May, we held our first ever Outdoor Music and Arts Festival at Tallahassee Pyramid.

Perhaps 200 friends and family came out to enjoy the food, music, dancing, and art.

The artists of Pyramid Tallahassee and Pyramid Studios filled the halls and the visual arts studios with their paintings, drawings, jewelry, and sculpture.

Volunteers from the FSU Fine Arts Department were also on hand, displaying collaborative works they'd completed with our students.

Food and refreshments from Soul Vegetarian, Snackman's Rolling Store, and Big D's Barbecue were also available while the musicians, singers, and dancers from Pyramid Tallahassee provided the entertainment on stage.



Dance ensemble entertains the crowd at Pyramid Tallahassee's spring outdoor festival.

Between sets of music by our students, we were lucky to also have performances by local rock bands Adam Reid and Cakewalk.

The two bands used a variety of interesting instruments, including shakers, flute, melodica, electric organ, harmonica and violin.

Throughout the night, our performers showcased their abilities at singing, drumming, playing keyboard, and dancing.

"The dancing and the singing were really good," student **Marsha Richardson** said. "My favorite part was probably the song Silver Lining."

At the end of the night, our singers sang the last song, "We're Not Gonna Take It," and four of our best dancers took the stage to strut their stuff, with an incredible performance of a dance called "I Got Friends, You Got Friends."

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Performers Join Band At The Legion Hall

By Lana M Smith
Director

Two of Pyramid Tallahassee's premier performers sat in with a local band at the American Legion Hall in June.

With just one joint rehearsal, **Nate Sailor** and **Derrick Grimsley** sang with Trigger Happy, a local R&B band.

The Pyramid contingent fit right in on one of the band's originals, "Brand New Hat."

In addition, Mr. Sailor on the drums and vocals, vocalist Grimsley and Performing Arts Instructor **Danny Wood** on keyboard, impressed a crowd of 200 with their newly-formed rock band.

Their songs included "Hit the Road Jack" and "Midnight Hour." **Sunne Couver** added "Yesterday" and "Sound of Silence."

Finally, three vocalists from Pyramid Studios, **Rick Carton**, **Jamie Ueberhorst** and **DeArtist Stevens** got the audience onto the dance floor with tunes such as "That's Alright Momma," "Mystery Train" and "God Only Knows."



Nate Sailor and Derrick Grimsley stand in with the rock band Trigger Happy

The performance was accompanied by an art exhibit hung by Tallahassee Visual Arts Coordinator **Maureen Raftery** and her counterpart at Studios, **Mary Popp**.

The performance with the community band represents another step toward joining forces with outside bands.

Local musicians have for several years backed Pyramid vocalists in Studios summer show, community groups performed sets at Tallahassee's spring outdoor concert, and Pyramid Panama City performed on stage this year with community performers.

All the groups who have worked with Pyramid per-

formers have expressed interest in doing much more.

Rehearsal is difficult because most musicians can't rehearse during the day while Pyramid performers have limited access to transportation for night rehearsals.

All of the integrated performances this year have had only one joint rehearsal.

Despite the barriers, words can not describe the pride we felt watching Pyramid musicians join with the band to deliver an outstanding performance.

These guys aren't amateurs anymore. Wow, what a sight to see.

Pyramid and University Artists Collaborate

By Maureen Raftery
Visual Arts Coordinator

Young artistic energy filled the art studio in April.

Twenty-four FSU art students created in our studio, sharing their passion, working side-by-side with our artists, and collaborating on a beautiful, innovative art installation that now embellishes our Daily Living area.

FSU Professor **Carrie Baade** wanted to include a community outreach element for the students in her BFA Workshop class. Fortunately, she called Pyramid Tallahassee.

The FSU art students were matched with Pyramid Tallahassee art students. Each duo worked together, creating art on a canvas panel.

On the first half, Pyramid artists took the lead by painting abstract pieces while the FSU art students offered assistance, ideas, techniques, or methods.

Initially, there were uncomfortable looks, apprehensive movements and uncertainty, but within minutes, everyone was smiling, talking, interacting, sharing, and creating.



The installation created by Pyramid Tallahassee and FSU art students on display.

Welcoming Pyramid artists eager to experience this collaboration bridged the gap, making everyone feel comfortable.

Meanwhile, the BFA workshop photographer took digital portraits of each artist involved in the project.

Once the photos were taken and the first half of the painting was completed, the canvases went home with the BFA students who used the photographs of their partners to paint their portraits on the other halves of the canvases.

While paintings were being made, three sculpture students

from the BFA Workshop planned the installation of the collaborative work.

They designed and then built an innovative framing system that angled each canvas to allow ease of viewing by folks who travel through the hallway where the portraits would hang.

It was an amazing experience — students sharing their passion for art, an amazing installation showcasing the character and beauty in the faces of Pyramid students, and an opportunity for sharing the wonders of our Pyramid artists with FSU artists.

Volunteers Help Preserve City Treasure

By Amy Harvey
Program Coordinator

A group of our intrepid gardeners volunteered their talents at the Goodwood Museum and Gardens this summer.

The Goodwood Gardens have been restored to their early 20th century design and the grounds are comprised of only heirloom plants that were available at turn of the century in North Florida.

Pyramid students have been working with other garden volunteers on Friday mornings, assisting with the up-keep and maintenance of the



Lloyd Smith and Arthur Henry on the job at Goodwood.

grounds by keeping the areas around the Jubilee House and the reflecting pool weed-free and mulched with pine straw.

Students also have helped maintain the ginger beds, the azalea bushes and have planted the petunias on display in front of the main house.

Pyramid students had the opportunity to expand their knowledge of horticulture and plant production by touring the green house where the heirloom plants are propagated, the heirloom rose garden and by demonstrations of root cuttings.

The volunteer opportunity at Goodwood has also been an excellent opportunity to meet and socialize with other volunteer gardeners.

Students Explore Tallahassee's Rich Culture

The community outing program is growing by leaps and bounds as our students explore the rich variety of cultural opportunities available in Tallahassee.

Integrating students into the community is the hallmark of Pyramid's philosophy and the outings allow students to put into practice the skills they learn every day, and to explore and expand their hori-

zons.

For example, Pyramid artists who visit art galleries may find inspiration. After visiting the FSU Museum of Fine arts, **Michael Dedmon** said, "As soon as I walked in I saw a painting that I really liked. I would like to create a painting like that."

Students explore vocational possibilities at the FAMU

viticulture program, and history and science come alive at Mission San Luis and The Challenger Learning Center.

The program also teaches basic skills, such as how to cross the road safely and how to find restrooms.

We can't wait to explore more of this wonderful city we call home.

Supreme Court Hosts Pyramid Students

This past Monday, eight students went with staff **Jim Prater** to visit the Florida Supreme Court.

John Newton, general counsel for the Agency for Persons with Disabilities, arranged the visit and met the students downstairs to take them up to the court chamber.

They were met upstairs by Florida Supreme Court Justice **Ricky Polston**.

Justice Polston gave the students a presentation in the Court Chamber on the history of The Court and the role the Supreme Court Justices play in the Judicial system.

Justice Polston then told the students about a recent case of a death penalty appeal in which a man was executed the week before for a crime committed in 1983.

Justice Polston showed a video of the lawyers arguing the death penalty appeal.

Then Mr. Newton and his intern argued a mock case for the students.

The scenario was this: a driver was motioned to proceed through a red light by a policeman directing traffic. The driver was subsequently



Supreme Court Justice Ricky Polston briefs Pyramid visitors on a death-penalty appeal.

involved in a crash in the intersection.

Mr. Newton argued that the driver was not at fault because he was following the directions of the policeman. Mr. Newton's intern argued that the driver was at fault because he should have followed the light.

Afterward, Mr. Newton gave the students a tour. They were able to see the justices' conference room off the courtroom. They toured the Law Library, which contained law books dating back to the 1560's, and they viewed the artwork in the rotunda.

Pyramid students can use your help in providing equipment and materials that enhance their learning experiences.

Please review this list. Perhaps you have some of

Wish List

these items going unused in your closets or garage. We can put them to good use.

- Art supplies

- Picture frames
- A microwave oven
- Sewing Machine
- Clothing: trousers, shorts, belts, shirts.

Knights of Columbus Support Pyramid

One morning in mid-June, Pyramid staff and students waited with excitement for **Ron Reynoldos**, Grand Knight of the local Knights of Columbus to arrive.

Mr. Reynoldos was coming to present a generous check to Pyramid. The funds were raised from a Tootsie Roll fundraiser in May.

The Knights have been among the most consistent contributors to Pyramids across the state, and we are grateful for their support.



Grand Knight Ron Reynoldos presents a check for \$1,597 to Pyramid Director Lana Smith and Student Body President Nate Sailor.

Tallahassee's Friends Made A Difference

Pyramid Tallahassee' friends really came through for the summer show at The Moon.

Underwriters, advertisers and donors contributed more than \$2,600, which ensured that Pyramid Tallassee performers got paid for their electrifying performance, that production costs were paid and that money is available to enhance the performing-arts program.

"The support our families and friends provided was gratifying," Director Lana Smith said. "We are increasingly dependent on the community to provide the training our students deserve."

Heading up the effort was parent Bob Fletcher.

"Mr. Fletcher has always been there for Pyramid," Ms. Smith said. "This year, he really outdid himself."

Underwriters included:

Ken and Patricia Lindau, First Franklin Financial Services and Kia Auto Sports.

Donors included:

Apache Freight Lines, Earlene Preston, Janey Dupont-Butler, Maggie Brown, John & Sara Betsey, Ecenia Steven and one anonymous donor.

Advertisers included:

Angie's Marine, Bada Bean Coffee & Tea, Brooks Concrete (L.B. Brooks), Crum's Mini Mall, Full Press Apparel, Hook Wreck Henry's, The Jewelry Man, Martin Vending, Mineral Springs Seafood (Tim & Kim Williams), My-Way Seafood, Panacea Harbor Marina, Paul's Plumbing, Peddie Chemicals (Angie Peddie), Posey's Oyster Bar, Roly Poly, and Saladoino's.

We truly thank each and every one of you.

Sensory Integration Targets Barriers

**By Jennifer Barron
Program Coordinator**

At Pyramid, students are exposed to a variety of mediums, settings, and activities to increase independence and assist them with managing anxiety.

For a large portion of our students, traditional training methods yield the desired outcomes.

For the students that show no interest in the arts or other activities, resist assistance, or whose barriers are the most difficult to overcome, research has found that a concept called Sensory Integration is a positive approach to breaking the barriers.

Sensory integration refers to how people use the information provided by all the sensations coming from within the body and from the external environment.

Senses integrate to form a complete understanding of who you are, where you are, and what is happening around you.

Because your brain uses information about sights, sounds,

textures, smells, tastes, and movement in an organized way, you assign meaning to your sensory experiences, and you know how to respond and behave accordingly.

The leadership team is geared up and ready to develop and implement the sensory integration program.

In preparation for this change, all Pyramid staff have been trained in the concepts and activities related to sensory integration.

Renovations are beginning to

prepare a designated area for a sensory room. The director, **Lana Smith**, has been interviewing for new staff with art, music, and therapy backgrounds to assist in this effort.

The staff have already identified many students at Pyramid Tallahassee who can take advantage of such training.

The programming area will consist of a sensory room, specialized sensory equipment to be used in the sensory room and in classrooms, a repositioning and floor mat area and therapeutic art and music.

Outdoor Festival

3-7 p.m. Saturday, October 17

Music & Dance

- Pyramid's hot new R&B band
- New dance Routines
- Vocal ensembles
- Community Bands

Art Exhibit

Food & Drink

McKeithan Plaza
W. Tennessee
& Apleyard

**Join us at Pyramid
Tallahassee**

**for an leisurely
afternoon with
family & friends
and a**

**new appreciation
for the talents
of
Pyramid
artists & performers**

Tallahassee Pyramid
2645 W. Tennessee Street, Unit #5
Tallahassee, FL 32304

Telephone: 850-574-4978
Fax: 850-576-1048
lsmith@pyramidinc.org
www.pyramidinc.org

We believe in what we do.
We make a difference.

Danny Wood Named Performing Arts Head

By **Lana Smith**
Director

Danny Wood, who has been Pyramid Tallahassee's performing arts instructor for the past two years, has been chosen as the Performing Arts Coordinator.

Mr. Wood was chosen from an exceptional pool of applicants.

During his tenure as an instructor, he has developed a series of innovations that have discovered and nurtured student talent and created a number of opportunities for students to perform in community settings.

He created the Spring Outdoor festival, which will be followed next month with the



Mr. Wood

fall version. And, he has created a rock band with student vocals and instrumentation. In addition, Tallahassee performers have performed in several community venues, including one at the American Legion Hall that integrated student vocalists with a community band.

"We believe this promotion will lead to more innovation, more integration and more opportunities for our performers to perform in public," said Pyramid Arts Director **Bill Fuller**.

The move also will permit more students to be involved in the performing arts at all levels of ability.

Danya Davis, who has developed Tallahassee's dance program, was also promoted to Arts Instructor.

Ms. Davis choreographed the sensational dance routine that became part of Studios summer show at the Moon.

These promotions signal the next step in the development of a full performance program at Tallahassee.

The arts, including performance art, have proved to be very attractive to students, and an effective means of developing life skills.