

## Life is a stage

By Abri Nelson

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Rarely can you find a high school student who can recite lines from Shakespeare's plays, or a middle school student who can tell you about the playwright Moliere. But this summer, about 60 secondary school students are learning and performing comedies written by both men at a drama camp based in Great Falls called The Traveling Players.

The Traveling Players, which was founded by Jeanne Harrison in 2003, offers drama classes during the year, as well as month-long summer sessions for middle and high school students, and longer sessions for more advanced students.

The students learn about the elements of stage acting and are cast a part in a play that they perform at the end of the session. The high school sessions and the Traveling Troupe, an auditioned group that meets for six weeks and ends in a two-week tour, will perform two of Shakespeare's plays, "Two Gentlemen of Verona" and "A Midsummer Night's Dream." The middle school sessions will perform one of two Moliere plays, "The Learned Ladies" and "The Scams of Scapin."

"It's more serious acting than I usually do," said Amy Fifer, a rising sixth-grader from Great Falls. "They really take you seriously, and you really get to bond with other people."



Traveling Troupe members watch the high school ensemble rehearse "Two Gentlemen of Verona."

Emma Gebhardt and Molly Houlahan rehearse a scene from "The Scams of Scapin."

Jeanne Harrison serves as director of Traveling Players Ensemble.

Photos courtesy of Abri Nelson

Harrison wanted to create a camp where students could experience what it is like to be a traveling actor. The camp is held outdoors at Meadowlark Gardens in Vienna, and there is a campout every Thursday night. She thinks it is this environment, combined with the camp's size, that really helps the students bond.

"You talk to people differently around a campfire. It helps you form strong and deep connections with other people," Harrison said. She added that the outdoors training is beneficial because it helps students build confidence. Because there is so much variation in theatrical performances, many actors become insecure on stage.

Harrison said she is trying to build a whole new generation of actors who are adaptable, self-aware and environmentally aware. The camp draws students from all over Northern Virginia, Washington, D.C., and Maryland, and even from as far as Pennsylvania in the case of Molly Houlahan, a rising ninth-grader who was cast as Scapin.

"It's a great way to express yourself and step out of your regular life," Molly said. "I love seeing how it changes people. People are always there to teach you. I think it was just this year that I've decided I want to do this for life."

Her newfound friend, Emma Gebhard, a rising eighth-grader from Washington, D.C., who was standing nearby, agreed.

"They care about you. It's like coming home."

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