

Lifestyles

Wednesday, January 24, 2007

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Temple Beth Am to host 'Between the Covers'

Temple Beth Am Sisterhood will host "Between the Covers" with Jewish authors at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 25, at 4660 Sheridan Drive in Williamsville. Janeen Greene will discuss "The World to Come: A Novel" by Dara Horn. For more information, call 633-8877.

Buffalo Gateway Chorus

Women in four-part harmony

by JILL SCHMELZER
Reporter

"Believe in what you feel inside, and give your dreams the wings to fly. You have everything you need. If you just believe."

The women of Buffalo Gateway Chorus sang country star Josh Groban's new release during rehearsal Jan. 17 and truly believed in what they were singing.

The group is a competitive division of Sweet Adelines, a barbershop-quartet-style chorus. That means they sing in four-part harmony.

Each Wednesday, 80 singers from across New York and Canada gather to rehearse and receive vocal education at The South East Community Center, located at 181 Lincoln St. in Depew.

Throughout the year they perform for local venues such as the Canterbury Woods retirement facility. They also hold a fall show and perform in the Region 16 Contest, in which approximately 30 choruses from New York, Pennsylvania and Canada compete for a spot in the International Contest to be held in Calgary, Canada, this year.

For the past several regional contests, which are held annually, the group has achieved the third and fourth placements, but Joy Perruzzini of Lancaster said they have been bumping the score edges, and she be-

lieves they will place in one of the top two highest score brackets this year.

The chorus ranges in age from women in their 20s to a woman who will turn 90 in May — Nina McMahon.

She joined the group 40 years ago and drives from Derby, N.Y., each week to sing her heart out.

"I don't know what I'd do without them," McMahon said. "They are just like a whole bunch of sisters."

Kerri Onan of Cheektowaga agreed.

"I love the sisterhood and the friendship," she said. "The camaraderie is great for your body and soul."

Onan said since joining five years ago, she has appreciated music more than ever.

Jane White of Amherst has been with the group since 1999. She was previously with a different chapter of Sweet Adelines but switched to the Buffalo Gateway Chorus because of its four-part harmony and crisp sound.

"I didn't want to sing in a church choir," she said, noting that she was apprehensive at first that Sweet Adelines would be old-fashioned, but White said she was wrong.

"We have fantastic vocal training," she said. "We're really good."

Mary Jackson of Clarence, a five-year member of the chorus, said she joined instantly after being "blown away by its sound."

"Our director has the most wonderful sense of humor," Jackson said of Diane Porsch, director of the Buffalo Gateway Chorus. "I've lost 15 pounds and improved my voice."

Porsch, a Williamsville resident, took over the group in 2001 and said everyone in the chorus is on the same page.

Porsch said, "One hundred percent of the people in it agree on the same goals — to achieve 'A'-level performance ability."

Jackson sings lead, which is the group of singers in the chorus who sing the melody. The tenors, baritones and bass singers harmonize with them.

"Diane Porsch is one of the most talented, wonderful, directors I've ever worked with," said Peruzzini.

"You don't want to miss," Peruzzini said of rehearsing each Wednesday for three hours, plus occasional Saturdays and private lessons. "It's something you look forward to every week."

Wanda Stachowski of West Seneca joined seven years ago after she needed to find some solid ground during an otherwise rough period in her life.

"They touched me emotionally. They embraced me and gave me the strength and courage to go on," Stachowski said. "There is nothing that can stop me if I can do this."

Prior to joining the group, Stachowski said she couldn't stand in public; now she's singing notes and dancing on stage.



Mary Jackson, left, Jane White and Patti Mandiak sing a number with the Buffalo Gateway Chorus during rehearsal at the South East Works Community Center in Depew.

Photos by John Rusac
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Patti Mandiak of Orchard Park said she also joined at a time when she needed to do something for herself.

"They've become my other family," said Mandiak, who is entering her 30th year with the group.

She said this year she has joined a quartet that will be part of the traveling "Singing Valentines."

"Who said you can't teach an old dog new tricks," Mandiak added.

She and three other girls from the chorus will travel to a person's work or home, give them a flower and chocolate, then serenade them with two songs.

"My favorite is going to a person's work," Mandiak said. "They (the recipient) get so embarrassed."

Bonnie Bizzozero of Tonawanda said it is the level of excellence that is demanded by the group that makes her stick with singing.

She joined Sweet Adelines 30 years ago and began singing with Buffalo Gateway in 2000.

Leah Pratt, one of the youngest members, joined in November 2005.

The East Aurora native said

she knew of the group when she was in high school, because she was in a group called Young Women in Harmony, which works with members of Sweet Adelines.

Pratt said she moved away for a few years but returned to East Aurora and was looking to get back into singing.

"They are a really supportive group of women," she added. "They don't make me feel like the youngest."

She said she has learned a great deal since she joined.

"I never thought I was that great of a singer," Pratt said. "But coaches from across the nation come and work with us one on one."

Buffalo Gateway Chorus will hold a Mardi Gras Cabaret from 7:30 to 11:30 p.m. at the Polish Falcons Club, 445 Columbia Ave., Depew. There is reserved seating only. Call 635-8642.

To order a singing valentine for that special someone, call 635-8642, or e-mail singingvalentines@buffalogatewaychorus.com. For more information about the chorus, visit www.buffalogatewaychorus.com.

e-mail: jschmelzer@beenews.com



Bonnie Bizzozero, Nina McMahon, Leah Pratt and Wanda Stachowski practiced the song "Red Robin" for their upcoming Regional Contest competition in April.