



OUTDOOR THEATER — The De Wolfe family camped out on Island Park for Movies in the Park. Shown left to right, Ian, Amy, Isabel and Izak watched

the movie, "High School Musical 2" on June 27.

Photo by Jim Smerecak
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North grad returns with Broadway hit

by **BY ALLISON HANSEN**
Intern

Being on stage had always been Jeanette Norton's dream until she discovered another side of theater that she loved more.

Norton, a 2002 graduate of Williamsville North High School, lives in New York City, working as assistant to the general manager at 321 Theatrical Management, a company that oversees all aspects of producing and managing a Broadway show, including "Wicked," the production currently at Shea's Performing Arts Center.



Jeanette Norton

Norton returned to Buffalo this week and will be filling in as the assistant company manager while the company manager is on vacation.

According to Norton, who hasn't been in Buffalo since the Christmas holiday, she cannot wait to visit Mighty Taco and Anderson's. She said it's lucky for her that the company manager's vacation takes place while the show is in her hometown.

Norton said she moved to New York City to attend Marymount Manhattan College in pursuit of an acting career and instead dis-

covered another side of theater she never knew existed.

"I always felt something was missing," Norton said of her acting studies. After her sophomore year, Norton decided to take a stage managing class, and Norton's teacher suggested she look for a behind-the-scenes internship.

At the beginning of her junior year, Norton started an internship at 321 Theatrical Management, working there for one year while in school before the company offered her a full-time position. She graduated early — in January 2006 — with a Bachelor of Arts in theater performance

and accepted the job, working her way up to the position she holds today.

In high school, Norton appeared in three musicals — "Hello Dolly," "Anything Goes" and "Guys and Dolls" — as well as four plays, including "Rehearsal for Murder" and "Little Women."

"Theater was where I found my home," Norton said. "I had done theater outside of school, but when I got to high school it really became like a family."

Norton performed with Ghostlight Theatre Company and

Shakespeare in Delaware Park, she said.

"I would literally go from school to rehearsal after school for North, then to rehearsal at night for community theater," Norton said. "How I was able to do my homework, I'm not sure."

After finding a home in theater during high school, Norton said theater has been how she has made her life in New York City.

With the support of her college to fall back on, Norton does not regret making the move when she did.

"New York City is not made for everyone, but if it's made for you, you know it after a couple of months," Norton said. "If you want to do big theater, New York is the place to be."

Norton is no stranger to Shea's, where she will be working on the musical, and where she said she worked as a counselor one summer for Camp Broadway.

"It's where my parents took us to see Broadway shows," she said. "That's how my love of theater began."

"It's cool to bring what I work on every day to Buffalo and share it with the community I grew up in," Norton said.

"It's like, 'Hey, Mom, look, I made it to Broadway after all, just in a different way,'" she said.

Buff State honors Williamsville resident

Leonard S. Sikora, Class of 1950, received the Distinguished Alumnus Award from Buffalo State College at the commencement program held in May.

Sikora was honored for exemplifying all that the college hopes for from its alumni.

"He has been successful in his career, outstanding in his character and generous with his time, resources, and talents to the college, his profession and community," a representative from the college stated.

After graduating, Sikora served as a teacher and administrator in the Buffalo Public Schools for more than 40 years.

Many organizations have recognized his contributions. AARP presented him with the Andrus Award for communication and health issues advocacy. The Network in Aging presented the Jerry Flaschner Humanitarian Award to him for local, state and national contributions to the field of aging.

Sikora serves on the board of the Western Zone Retired Teachers Association and Erie County Senior Services Advisory Board and is chair of the Founder's Fund, as well as on the executive committee of the New York State Retired Teachers Association. In 2005, he received the Buffalo State Foundation Chairman's Recognition Award.

SOMEONE YOU SHOULD KNOW

Mount St. Mary Athlete of the Year named

by **JILL SCHMELZER**

Ashley LaPorta, a recent graduate of Mount St. Mary Academy, picked up the softball for the first time at age 8. She pitched for St. Amelia Wildcats and began honing her skills.

As a senior at the Mount, LaPorta nabbed the title "Athlete of the Year" for her talents on the softball field and the basketball and volleyball courts. LaPorta was also named First Team All Catholic this year and second team the previous softball season. She was the team's Most Valuable Player for two consecutive years, sharing the title her junior year.

LaPorta's leadership skills didn't stop on the softball diamond either; she also served as co-captain of the Mount's basketball team as a senior. She was also a member of the volleyball team for three years but ended that career as a junior.

"I loved the pressure (from pitching) I got from my team," said the Town of Tonawanda resident. "Everyone depended on me."

LaPorta said she had to work at her pitching skills, taking lessons from two pitching coaches — Maryann Hopkins and Joe Catalano.

She will join the Fredonia State Blue Devils next season as a pitcher and pursue a degree in elementary education, focusing on English.

The Blue Devils' coach saw LaPorta play during a game with her travel team — Galassi's Elite out of North Tonawanda — at the Pepsi Center.

"I went and visited the school and really liked it," she said of Fredonia, noting that her grandparents live near the college.

Her parents, Pat and Mary, own LaPorta's Pizzeria at 435 W. Klein Road in Amherst.

The younger LaPorta volunteered at Schofield Nursing Home and for St. Amelia's intramural basketball program during her high school career. She earned honor roll status all four years, and said her decision to pursue a career in English education came from inspiring educators she has encountered in the past. She interned at St. Amelia's, her grammar school alma mater, this past year.

LaPorta also has a sister, Kristen, who recently graduated from St. John Fisher College.

(Story ideas for this feature can be sent to Amherst Bee Associate Editor Jessica L. Finch, Bee Publications, PO Box 150, Buffalo, NY 14231-0150 or by calling 204-4917.)



LaPorta

Kwaczala, 100, finds love, laughter in life

Clara Kwaczala celebrated her 100th birthday at Legacy Health Care at Williamsville Suburban this past week.

She was born in Buffalo on June 27, 1908, to John and Pearl (Robinski) Adamaszek and grew up in a Polish neighborhood with her three sisters and nine brothers.

She lived in Buffalo the majority of her life and married John Kwaczala in 1927. That same year they had their son, Leonard.

Leonard recalls his mother speaking of the wonderful times she and her family spent together playing the piano and singing when she was a young girl. He said she always loved dancing to polka music.

He added that Kwaczala has always been a "loveable and laughable" woman. She has always enjoyed attending musicals and going out to nice restaurants and meeting new people.

Together, Kwaczala and Leonard traveled around the world. Some of the places they visited include Europe, Russia, Finland, Alaska and Bermuda. Leonard recalled that he and his mother were so excited when they saw Pope John Paul on one of their trips.

Leonard said his mother has always been a woman who enjoyed herself. Kwaczala still attends bingo and musical entertainment shows. With the assistance of her son, she is still able to enjoy some of the activities she did in the community.



Kwaczala

School News

St. Joseph's Collegiate Institute recently named members to its board of trustees, including Thomas Comer '81, of Amherst, and Dennis J. Szeffel of Getzville. They were elected to serve a three-year term. Comer is president, CEO and owner of Alliance Sleep Products, Inc., and Szeffel is the chief administrative officer of Delaware North Companies.

Kadimah School of Buffalo held an event in June to benefit Kadimah's Scholarship Fund. This year's committee included Sherri Recoon, Mary Bengart, Jeanette Winczer Dubin, Dana Stoffman, Michelle Parentis, Heidi Yellen, Wendy Pressman, Cindy Levy, Amy Carrol, Cindy Levy, Sue Richheimer, Amy Shuman, Marcy Katzman Lenard, Amy Carrol and Einav Symons. Chairwomen

were Amy Carrol and Wendy Pressman.

Leaders of Tomorrow Scholarships were awarded to the following high school students: Jennifer Newhouse of Amherst Central; Patricia Jetty of Amherst Christian Academy; Renee LaPlante of Sweet Home; Hillary Scivani of Williamsville East; Kayla Maxwell of Williamsville North; and Zachary McClure of Williamsville South.