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The Yankton Children's Theatre Company is opening the door on its next production "The Berenstain Bears: On Stage" with four productions beginning Thursday, Sept. 16. The show features 20 youth from the area. Pictured are Papa Bear (Logan Haak), Mama Bear (Hailey Baugh), Brother Bear (Ryan Eichacker) and Sister Bear (Cate Perakslis).

'BEAR' STAGE

The Yankton Children's Theatre Company Heads Out To The Forest With The 'Berenstain Bears'

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With themes ranging from cleaning up messy rooms to telling the truth and adjusting to new siblings, a familiar family friend will be visiting Mount Marty College's Marian Auditorium, when the Yankton Children's Theatre Company (YCTC) presents "The Berenstain Bears: On Stage."

For four performances, Thursday, Sept. 16-Sunday, Sept. 19, a cast of 20 area children will bring the popular children's books to life with music and laughter.

"This play is about the old stories," said Logan Haak, who plays Papa Bear in the production. "I grew up reading the books and used to like the show. Papa Bear is the one person that I remember the most from the show, so I am very excited to play that part."

Haak, who is a seventh-grader at Yankton Middle School, said that being a part of the YCTC is something he treasures.

"This is one of the greatest experiences I have had in my whole life. I am so lucky that I have this to do," he said. "I have been in six shows. I started in 2008 during 'School House Rock.' I have learned a lot of stuff and made new friends because of theater. Anyone who wants to do this, do it. It is one of the best things you can do. You can do sports, music — this is fun, too."

Developing that love of theater is exactly what the YCTC is all about, said YCTC director Allison Spak.

"The kids need this to get started, to get the opportunity to learn to love the stage," she said. "Logan has been around a while and Hailey (Baugh) the second-longest. Then there are all the young ones who have been in the company less than a year. They just love it. (One performer) came up to me and said, 'I have a new goal in life, Allison. My dad and I were out on the Internet looking at colleges.' And I was like, 'Oh yeah what are you, 9 or 10?' But, then he said, 'My goal is Juilliard.' He is one of those kids that will work his butt off to get there."

Spak said that with a dedicated children's theatre company, the youth of the community get the opportunity to be comfortable on stage and get the opportunity to participate.

"In a lot of communities, you would be auditioning with 60 kids for one part in one play," she said. "This way you may have to compete against 10 kids, and it is geared toward the children. Even when we have a 100 or some in the cast, you have to give everybody a chance, get them onstage."

With "Berenstain Bears" the opportunity presented itself for a much younger cast.

"It is more geared toward young kids, as the books are more geared toward young kids," she said. "The ages of the cast are only 5-14. There is no one older than that. The kids are all eighth grade or down. There are a lot of young actors. So it is a very different experience watching the show. You don't have the older, more mature set of kids on stage, so who knows what is going to happen when you have little kids on the stage?"

Spak said this play has given her a great opportunity to help teach the younger children about developing characters and keeping it fun and interesting for them.

"A play like this allows you to play with the kids and help them develop their characters," she said. "A lot of them have gone and watched the videos and tried to look for inspiration that way. Teaching them how to do the movement is harder. Here, they are doing stories on life that they have not experienced yet."

"These kids have more guts than a lot of adults have," Spak said. "To step up on that stage and give it a shot, I have to hand it to them. The little kids are my inspiration."

Because the musical focuses on five specific life lessons that are geared toward younger kids, Spak hopes parents with young children make a point to see the show.

"It is going to be a good old-fashioned kids show, based on the classic books of which there are hundreds out there," she said. "Basically, the whole show is a synopsis of about 10 of the books. The biggest scene (is) the messy room. There are scenes about telling the truth. The opening tells the story

what goes into a production, at the same time keeping it fun and interesting for them.

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ALLISON SPAK

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