

NEIGHBORS



The News Journal GINGER WALL

The cast of "Seussical the Musical" rehearses at the Premier Centre for the Arts in Middletown.



Ry Reegan of Middletown rehearses with of "Seussical the Musical."

FYI

Premier Centre for the Arts

WHO: Directors Fred Munzert and Lisa B

WHERE: 27 Anderson St., Middletown, Dt

CONTACT: 378-1384

GOAL: Dedicated to encouraging creati
the arts while promoting self-confidence

WHAT: Hosts art exhibits and produces t
formances a year.

"Seussical the Musical"

WHERE: Middletown High School, Del. 25
Silver Lake Road

WHEN: 7:30 p.m. Fri.-Sat. and Oct. 29-30,

TICKETS: \$18 adults; \$12 children; all se

A new place for the arts

Premier Centre offers instruction in many disciplines

By CAROL CHILD
Special to The News Journal

MIDDLETOWN — Two years ago when Fred Munzert and his sister Lisa Bonacquisti, 1990 Miss Delaware, began offering music and dance classes from a little room in the Everett Theatre, they had two teachers besides themselves, and 20 students.

Now the Premier Centre for the Arts occupies a 7,500-square-foot facility molded from an old barn, office building and warehouses on Anderson Street in the heart of Middletown where 40 teachers and 500 students, ranging in age from 3 to fortysomething, pursue a spectrum of performing and fine arts. Munzert and Bonacquisti, who grew up in New Castle, attribute their success to longevity.

"We had been in the arts for a number of years," said Munzert. Munzert, who teaches music, played organ in church at 14 after beginning piano and organ lessons at about age 9; he has performed on radio, TV and stage, as well as at Disney World. Bonacquisti, who teaches ballet, tap, jazz and baton, started dance lessons at age 3, is an experienced competitive baton twirler and won a talent award at the 1990 Miss America pageant.

"Fred and I have always had



Fred Munzert and Lisa Bonacquisti drop in on the rehearsal.

a love for the arts," said Bonacquisti. "We experience such joy through the arts, we wanted to pass it on to students and adults in the area."

The pair began by offering a full dance program and private music lessons. Munzert said they were looking for approximately 2,000 square feet, but when they saw the large Anderson Street facility they knew that was it.

The center is privately funded. They didn't know how they would fill up all the spaces at first, but that concern didn't last long.

"The growth in housing in

Middletown far surpasses the growth of supportive businesses," said Munzert, a graduate of West Chester University in speech communications.

"We have a fantastic staff. As soon as we began teaching in the Everett Theatre, résumés started pouring in. Ed Ryan came down from Brooklyn. He has a double major in drums and guitar. And we have an unbelievable hip-hop teacher, Karin Digiovani."

The center has private music studios and larger music classrooms. All instruction focuses on technique, discipline and practice, viewing recitals and art ex-

hibitions as byproducts. Munzert and Bonacquisti, the center's directors, audit classes to ensure teaching be technically superior and standards meet their vision of accomplishment on all levels through to performance.

Guest artists, such as choreographers and dancers Scott Jacobs and Tracy Friswell, are invited to share their expertise. Teachers at the center also engage in artist-in-residence programs at Appoquinimink, St. Anne's and St. Andrew's schools.

PCA students enrolled in programs extending over the complete year are expected to perform in recitals. But PCA does hold open casting calls. Principals in "Seussical the Musical" at Middletown High are full-time performers from Delaware and neighboring states.

Playing the lead in the success of the center is word of mouth. Students come to explore and then come back, bringing their friends and family. The expansion has taken on its own momentum.

"There's a synergy with all the arts under one roof," said Munzert. "You can be creating a painting and hear someone playing the trumpet down the hall." Gallery tracking in the hallways exhibits student art. "People who tour our center comment favorably on the facility."

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"Support of the arts and history will bring in visitors interested in our heritage and help revitalize our downtown area," said Lorraine Goodman, the new program director for Main Street Middletown.

"The Premier Centre for the Arts is a critical component."

Soon visitors to the town that up until a few years ago was an unpretentious agricultural center will be able to see how Delaware artists have captured the beauty and uniqueness of vanishing landmarks when in late October or November - dates have yet to be determined - PCA will host "Treasures of the Land: Delaware Barns and Outbuildings," a Rehoboth Art League collaborative exhibit currently traveling among galleries around the state, which features nine painters, four photographers and three quilters.

The works "remind of us a simpler time and the value of the fruits of our labor," said painter Anne Crown-Cyr, curator of the exhibit, "an old barn on a lovely wide-open field, something once ... so integral ... to American life."

"We want to explore and grow deeper within the arts," said Munzert. "We look to having a year-round schedule with a full summer program and four to five shows a year. We enjoy being involved within the community."

FYI

Premier Centre for the Arts

WHO: Directors Fred Munzert and Lisa Bonacquisti
WHERE: 27 Anderson St., Middletown, DE 19709
CONTACT: 378-1384

GOAL: Dedicated to encouraging creative expression through the arts while promoting self-confidence and self-discipline.
WHAT: Hosts art exhibits and produces two to three stage performances a year.

"Seussical the Musical"

WHERE: Middletown High School, Del. 299 (East Main Street) at Silver Lake Road
WHEN: 7:30 p.m. Fri.-Sat. and Oct. 29-30, 3 p.m. Sun. and Oct. 31
TICKETS: \$18 adults; \$12 children; all seats reserved, 378-1384