

COMMUNITYconnections

POWERING LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS

York native arranges successful local theater

By Duane Kanagy, *Penn Lines Correspondent*

LYN BERGDOLL is at heart a choreographer. Choreographers compose, create, plan and arrange — mainly dance movements and patterns — but Bergdoll used these skills to run a successful community theater.

The former York County Junior Miss and high school choreographer “never dreamed in a million years” that the theater in which she danced as a student would be hers to operate later in life. Today, as executive director of the Belmont Theatre (formerly the York Little Theater), the Spring Grove native has helped guide a once struggling theater back to life with all the skills demanded of a choreographer — who is also blessed with experience in finance, fundraising, public relations, programming and managing two major capital projects.

Bergdoll came to the Belmont in 2012. At the time, the 80-year-old venue had already passed through several theatrical golden ages and was, in the face of diminishing governmental support for the arts, close to closing permanently. The theater’s iconic director, Bert Smith, under whom she had danced as a young woman, was gone after 30 years of putting the theater on



ASSESSING AUDITION: Lyn Bergdoll and Rene Staub watch Kate Vohs audition on the main stage with vocal director Lisa Pantano for the part of Elsa in the Belmont Theatre’s September production of “Disney Frozen Jr.” Bergdoll hired Staub as artistic director as part of the successful effort to revive the theater.

the map. The economy was in the doldrums and the leadership at the time was focused on the next show as opposed to the long-term financial health of the space.

“The community stepped forward and we paid off the debt,” Bergdoll notes proudly. “We now offer Broadway-quality performances.”

Evidence of that is a just-completed successful run of the classic musical drama “My Fair Lady.”

“The building was falling down and we needed to turn things around,” Bergdoll says. “Thank heavens the community stepped up. We made this building better and it has been a privilege doing so.”

Adams Electric has helped to sponsor at least one production per season.

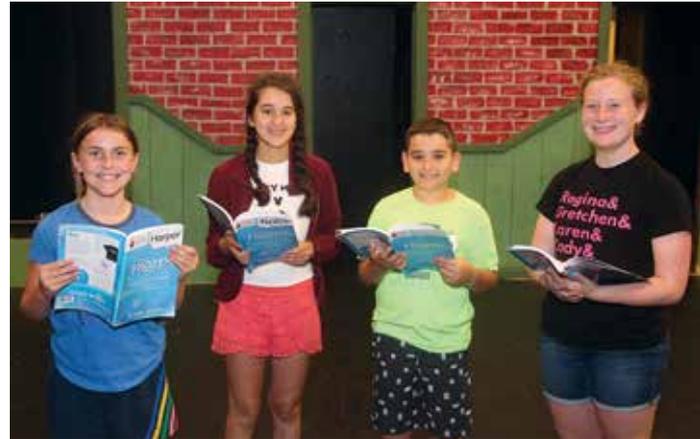
The theater operates with only two full-time and two part-time staff, which can lead to long workdays.

“I’m here for every show,” Bergdoll says.

“We appreciate that they are here,” she said of those who attend. “The energy in the lobby after a show is amazing. The cast comes out. You can feel it. I love that.”

The Belmont is now a regional theater, drawing patrons from Harrisburg, Lancaster and northern Maryland — basically a 50-mile radius of York.

Bergdoll honed her skills and gained experience as a consultant and working with the York Jewish Center and Junior Achievement Worldwide. She taught dance at York College for over 30 years and has been involved in countless local musical and dance



HOPING FOR “FROZEN”: From left, Harper, Sofia, Enzo and Rachel audition in the studio of the Belmont Theatre for parts in an upcoming production of “Disney Frozen Jr.,” sponsored by Adams Electric Cooperative, running Sept. 13-15, 20-22 and 27-29. Call 717-854-5715 for tickets.

productions. Earlier this year, the York County Economic Alliance recognized Bergdoll’s lifetime of achievements with its ATHENA Award.

Bergdoll believes in giving back to the community, which fuels her support for and leadership of the York Distinguished Young Women program. In 1968, Bergdoll was crowned Junior Miss for York County in her junior year of high school. She then helped to choreograph the program the following year.

While modest in its beginnings, the national Distinguished Young Women program grew and remains today the largest and oldest scholarship program of its kind for high school girls. Bergdoll is proud that the York County franchise is the most successful, awarding \$40,000 a year to talented young women with high academic achievements and who are active in the community.

“I feel I have been preparing all my life for this job,” she says, reflecting on her years with the Belmont. “Everything just meshes.” 🌀