

Stories, songs and improv theater wrap up summer reading program

By MARIA ALLARD, C & G Newspapers Staff Writer

EASTPOINTE (MI) — Karen Czarnik is a born storyteller. And a born musician and singer for that matter. "I've been performing since I was a little girl, and I found storytelling about 12 years ago," Czarnik said. "I enjoy the interaction of the audience. They give you energy." Czarnik tickled the funny bones of about 30 enthusiastic youngsters when she brought her Story Rhythms show to the Eastpointe Memorial Library Aug. 6. Czarnik's visit marked the library's Summer Reading Club finale. Those who participated in the program and read at least 10 books were invited.

"Today was a really good show," Czarnik said. "The audience was so fun to play with."

Czarnik began her performance playing an autoharp.

"The autoharp is in fact a harp. It's got 36 strings," Czarnik said. "A lot of kids tell me it looks like a piano because of the notes. When I push down buttons and I strum, it helps me to make a chord."

Czarnik's storytelling side then took over as she shared a number of stories filled with humor and sound effects, courtesy of Czarnik's talent.

"This is a celebration, so let's do some fun stuff," she said.

After the show, the children, with help from their parents, made story sticks based in American Indian tradition. They used yarn, beads, wire and colorful feathers to decorate them. The sticks were an incentive to get the kids to tell their own tales.

"It's an opportunity for you to turn off the television and share a story," Czarnik said. "You know what's funny about storytelling, you start to draw pictures in your head."

Czarnik's father, Leon Bonnici, influenced her to get into performing. Although he didn't perform professionally, Czarnik's dad was forever taking her to shows.

"He had a love for it. It's a gift he gave me. Every Saturday morning I remember doing chores while listening to show tunes my dad would blare," Czarnik said. "My mom also always encouraged me. It just stuck."

Growing up, Czarnik was a regular performer at the block parties held in her Redford neighborhood. And she can't remember a time when she wasn't on stage at summer camp.

"I love that storytelling connects all of us," Czarnik said. "No matter what form they are in, stories are universal."

After the summer club finale, Czarnik and interested students stayed after to work on the improv theater skills. Czarnik performs at schools, civic group outings, public events, family reunions, block parties and campfires.

Youth Services Librarian Sue Todd said about 110 children participated in this year's summer reading program. "Catch the Reading Bug" was this year's theme.

For more information on Karen Czarnik log onto www.storyrhythms.com or send an email to karen@storyrhythms.com.



STORY RHYTHMS

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