



Photo courtesy of Bill Harker. Campers at the Kevin Jones Performing Arts Camp show off their talent by performing “Seize The Day” from Disney’s “Newsies”. Faculty included Andrea Boone, Collette Riddle, Melia Jones and Bill Harker.

Getting into show business isn’t easy, but Kevin Jones helps young people do just that.

Jones, who is a native of Toronto, has spent 24 years in professional theater. He’s acted, directed and choreographed throughout his career.

Jones has been involved with the production of musicals such as “Disney’s Beauty and the Beast,” “Evita,” and “Phantom of the Opera.”

Jones has also coached hundreds of actors who have gone on to be on Broadway and in national and regional theater productions.

He knows what it takes for someone to make it in “the business.”

And he’s passing that knowledge on to generations of talented young people along the Grand Strand through the Kevin Jones Performing Arts Camps, which take place throughout the summer in Conway.

“Our whole goal with these camps is not just to put up a show,” Jones said. “We are a training ground, and our goal is to equip the kids with the skills they need to go out in the world and succeed, whether that’s auditioning for their high school show next year, a place like Theatre of the Republic, a professional theater job, or getting into college.”

At the end of each week-long camp, held at Christ Community Church in Conway, Jones and his students put on a showcase performance that features acting, singing, and dancing.

“It’s a real team effort to put up a show, always, and we have kids who chose to be acting majors,” Jones said. “They’ll be acting in scenes, and the musical theater majors are acting in the musical numbers.”

Colton Sherman is a rising senior at a local high school. He participated in his school’s musical performances in the past, and attending the camp this summer has given him confidence that he needed.

“I feel more confident with my acting, my singing, my performing just within the week of doing this camp,” Sherman said on Friday, as the last of five summer camps was winding down.

Sherman also points out that he has been able to learn about show business and what it takes to succeed. During the camp, participants were able to talk to playwrights, actors, and agents who are involved in Broadway productions, and that left a lasting impression on Sherman.

Rising senior Olivia Hensley has always loved performing, and when she worked with Jones in her high school’s musical last year he convinced her to try the camp. The experience strengthened her confidence, too.

“I came here and he challenged me, pushed me really hard,” Hensley said. “I’ve never really been able to do much in front of people without feeling like I was going to crash and burn, but in a matter of days I feel better about putting myself in front of people.”
Hensley wasn’t sure, initially, about the camp.

“KJ talked to me a lot about how influential his camps were and how much he could do for me, and I was like, ‘I don’t know,’” she said. “He definitely proved me wrong – he can do a lot for a person in five days.”

Rising senior Alicia Paitsel and recent high school graduate Caitlin Browne have both taken lessons from Jones in the past. Both gained experience from the camp and learned something they needed.

“I love singing, acting and dancing so it’s a perfect fit for me,” Paitsel said. “Being a senior this year I’m trying to show off my leadership skills.”

“I knew a couple of people who came last year and really enjoyed it, and he asked me to come, convinced me it was beneficial, that it would be a good ‘last hurrah’ before I went off to college,” said Browne.

Browne, who will be attending Anderson University in the fall as a musical theater major, has been involved with performing arts for a long time. She has taken dance lessons, been in her high school band, been on a color guard team, and participated in show choir and theater programs.

Brown has one piece of advice for students who might be thinking of entering the performing arts in school: try anything.

“Go to as many lessons, as many workshops as you can,” Browne said. “If you see auditions for some show you’ve never heard of, go to it anyway because there’s always something you can take away from the experience.”

For Jones, helping young people achieve is a matter of balance.

“The key here is that we want to challenge them but not overwhelm them,” he said. “There’s a fine line there that most people don’t find, and you know that when you see shows that aren’t so successful, they either didn’t have enough challenge for the kids and they got bored, or they worked too hard and the kids couldn’t rise to that.

“We set the bar high, and we bring them up to it,” he concluded.