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Youth pastor Tyler Prater, front center, directs the Fellowship Baptist choir in the singing of one of the songs from this year's edition of the church's Liberty program. Performances will take place July 1 and 2, with a private showing taken place June 30 at FBC at 310 W. Pancake in Liberal. L&T

## **Fellowship Baptist Church to present 27th edition of 'Liberty'**

By ROBERT PIERCE

• Leader & Times

Through the pageantry of a Fourth of July parade, Fellowship Baptist's 2012 Liberty program honored America's unique citizens, events and traditions while portraying the tensions facing a family as they coped with a loved one at war.

The 2013 edition of the program continues to chronicle the Johnson family's journey as they encounter another unexpected and demanding challenge.

For Alex and brother, Jason, life has returned to normal since their Marine brother Matthew has returned from Afghanistan.

As Alex and Jason anticipate their senior trip to Washington D.C. and their graduation from high school, the family basks in the fortress of the youths' achievements, they feel nearly bulletproof. The family soon learns, however, that feeling cannot last forever.



Written by FBC's Erin Rush and directed by youth pastor Tyler Prater, this year's Liberty honors America's military, celebrates the sites of the nation's capital and reminds everyone of the true meaning of joy and sacrifice.

Prater said songs were added to the plot of the story to help bring the patriotic spirit to the audience on hand.

"Each scene leads into the musical number that we've chosen," he said. "It's all based upon the story that's being told through our characters."

In its 27th year, Prater said one constant with all Liberty programs is the use of the Armed Forces medley, and that will again be a part of this year's performance.

“We’ve never changed that part of the program,” he said. “It seems to be the highlight every year when we’re able to sing the Armed Forces medley with the different branches of the military represented by men that are either active or have served before.”

This year’s Liberty will also honor recent local West Point graduate Tyler Sutherland-Abbott, which Prater will be one of the bigger highlights of the show.

“It’s neat that we get to honor one of our hometown guys that just accomplished such a great thing by graduating from such a prestigious college,” Prater said.

Liberty 2013 likewise features some new music and some old favorites.

“We have some traditional American songs such as ‘Yankee Doodle Dandy,’ ‘You’re a Grand Ole Flag,’ ‘God Bless the USA,’ certainly some songs that are going to be conducive to singing along with,” Prater said. “We’ve got a song called ‘I Salute You’ that honors veterans, and during a portion of the song, the veterans will be highlighted, those that are sitting in the audience.”

Other songs include “I Pledge Allegiance to the Land,” which Prater calls a powerful piece that highlights both allegiance to America and to God.

“We’re singing a song called ‘In God, We Still Trust,’” he said. “Really that song promotes the fact that we’re still one nation under God and we’re unashamed of that fact. Our nation was founded under God, and we want to do everything we can as Christians to keep it one nation under God. All of these songs tie into the plot and the story that our characters are portraying in the drama.”

Prater said he and Rush began working on this year’s Liberty program almost immediately after last year’s closed.

“As he began to write and we began to finalize the writing of the story, I began to pick the musical numbers and get those arranged and put in order,” Prater said. “We started practicing at the first of the year with the first song and with the drama team.”

Prater said practices have been increased in the last two months, and that includes the show’s choir practicing as late as 10 p.m. on Wednesdays and a dress rehearsal which will take place next Saturday.

“We’re just convinced the difference between good and great is extra effort, and we have a group of people, none of whom we pay, that are just faithful to our church and faithful to our God and faithful to the vision that we want to put together a first class program for our community and be a blessing that way and give glory to God through it,” he said. “It’s the people of our church that have so graciously and willingly given of themselves hours upon hours for six months to make sure that this stays first class.”

Prater said traditionally, Liberty has been the largest patriotic production in Southwest Kansas, and following one of the other conventions of the show, admission is absolutely free.

“We’ve never charged anybody, and we’re going to continue to keep it that way,” he said.

Prater did say, however, last year’s edition of Liberty was well attended, so well, in fact, that the church did not have enough seating for everyone who wanted to attend. Some steps have been taken this year to provide a fix to that problem.

“We’re excited this year because we’re going to have additional seating on Monday and Tuesday nights,” he said. “Last year, we had to turn people away 20 minutes before the program even started. We had to close the doors. We don’t want to have to do that again.”

Prater said a private showing will take place this year on Sunday, June 30, for groups that typically reserve seats for Liberty, which he said will open up more than 100 seats on each night for the show’s other performances on July 1 and 2.

“We’re very confident that even if you don’t make it early, you’re still going to get a seat on Monday and Tuesday night,” he said. “We’re excited about people being able to be more comfortable and not so squished and having to be turned away before hand.”

Performances of Liberty will take place at 7 p.m. on July 1 and 2 at FBC at 310 W. Pancake in Liberal. For more information, call the church office at 624-7601.

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