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## USD No. 480 schools stage Christmas programs this week and next

By RACHEL COLEMAN

- Leader & Times

High school basketball teams scrimmaged in the Big House Monday night, but across the commons at Liberal High School, third-graders from Southlawn Elementary put on reindeer headbands and fidgeted as they waited to enter Jim Maskus Auditorium. They were at the school to perform their Christmas program, and the show was just the first of a full calendar running right up to the semester break that begins Dec. 21.

Music teacher Marilyn Ott, who also instructs children at Washington Elementary, said the Monday program was a success.

“It went well, they did a nice job,” she said. With a sizable audience of parents to fill the front section of the auditorium, the venue felt fancy and exciting to the children. Many of their siblings showed up to see the show wearing fancy holiday clothes.

“It’s a big deal to them,” Ott said.

Ott will direct the second- and third-graders from Washington in a Dec. 10 Christmas program next week. That show, titled “How the Penguins Saved Christmas,” will occur at 7 p.m. at Washington’s gymnasium/stage. Ott selects different material for each location, and decides who will stage a program based on how the children progress.

“It’s just whichever group is going to be most ready,” she said, adding with a chuckle, “My little first-graders — not yet. It takes them a little while to get the hang of it.”

Across town, the music students at South Middle School will run through final rehearsals today for a 7 p.m. concert on campus. South’s three musical ensembles, the choir, the band, and the show band, will all perform. Though it’s early in the month, school receptionist Yanira Torres said they’re hoping for a good turnout.

“We have had a lot of people come in the past,” she said, adding that she’s already marked her personal calendar for her daughter’s Christmas program. McDermott Elementary students will perform an all-school program 7 p.m. Thursday at the James Maskus Auditorium at LHS.

“She’s very excited,” Torres said. “She practices at home all the time. I think I know all the songs.”

Saturday, SMS’s show band will put on another show at the “Tinsel and Tread” Christmas parade. The group is scheduled to play at 6 p.m.

Programs continue through the next week. Garfield Elementary School invites parents and friends to a 6 p.m. event Monday, combining math and music.

“Each grade level will be hosting a fun family mathematical activity,” the school’s announcement noted. A Holiday Shop will also be open for families from 6 to 6:45 p.m. The third-grade Holiday Performance will begin at 7 p.m. and conclude with cookies at 7:45 p.m.

At the regular school board meeting, students from McDermott Elementary will take a second pass at performance, caroling to board members around 6:30 p.m.

Also on Monday, MacArthur Elementary School will put on its all-school Christmas program at 7 p.m. at LHS. School secretary Tammy Spain said the students, like all the district’s youngest, tend to be a bit awed by the auditorium. To help them feel ready for the program, MacArthur buses the students to LHS the afternoon of the program so they can get a feel for the site.

“We practice on the risers and on the stage,” Spain said. “That helps a lot, since all they’ve done so far is practice in our gym.”

Other preparations at MacArthur include serious costume-construction thanks to the parent coordinator and volunteers.

“One parent has been making costumes,” Spain said. “Some of the kids are going to be trees, some are going to be soldiers, some are candy canes.” Music teacher Stephanie Drymalski assigned several third-graders speaking parts, Spain said, “and they’re very serious about getting everything memorized.”

Drymalski also teaches music at Lincoln Elementary School, where the second-graders will stage a version of “Moosical” at 7 p.m. on Dec. 10 at the school gym.

Other concert dates in the district include a Dec. 12 fifth-grade musical at Cottonwood

Intermediate School, set for 6:30 p.m.; an 8 p.m. band concert at LHS that same evening; and a 3:30 p.m. concert Sunday, Dec. 15, featuring the LHS choir groups. Watch the Leader & Times for further details about upcoming performances by area students.

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