Chippewa Valley hosts multi-school choral concert for autism

Student Jay Callahan performed in the 2015 A Cappella for Autism concert. This year's concert will be held at Chippewa Valley High School in Clinton Township. Photo courtesy of JAMES PECAR

By Nicole Tuttle , For The Macomb Daily
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Students Christian Boni, Hayley Trombley, Brendan LaRose, Amber Galvano and Kelly Calandrino sang as a quintet for the 2015 A Cappella for Autism concert. This year's concert will feature vocal music from Chippewa Valley High School choirs, Algonquin Middle School, Wyandot Middle School and Erie Elementary School. Photo courtesy of JAMES PECAR

A four-school, two-night musical celebration will bring autism awareness to the forefront in Chippewa Valley Schools on April 19 and 20.

The (Mostly) A Cappella for Autism concert will be held at Chippewa Valley High School's Henrichsen Auditorium in Clinton Township on April 19 and 20. The event will feature vocal music from the choirs of Chippewa Valley High School.

On April 19, special guest vocalists will be present from Algonquin Middle School. On April 20, special guest vocalists from Erie Elementary School and Wyandot Middle School will participate in the concert. Both of these schools are Chippewa Valley Schools located in Clinton Township.

James Pecar, a choir director at Chippewa Valley High School, said as many as nine different choral groups from the high school will participate. As many as 20 to 25 songs will be included in the music performances.

 "We will sing music from Mozart to Motown and everything in between. Our choral department places a large emphasis on classical choral repertoire, so we will share some of that repertoire," Pecar said.

As in the past, other schools are included in the concert to give it a wider community feel.

"We have included other schools in the past," Pecar said. "This is more of a community event than a Chippewa Valley High School choir concert. We have such magnificent music programs in the district, we though they should be involved in making the night even more memorable than if they were not participating."

Fishbowl raffles will be held before the concerts at 6 p.m., and the concerts will begin at 7 p.m. Raffle ticket prices are $1 for one ticket, $5 for six tickets and $10 for 15 tickets.

Funds raised will benefit the Macomb/St. Clair County Affiliate of the Autism Society of America and Chippewa Valley vocal music.

The cause is a personal one to Pecar, who has a cousin with autism. As a high school student he took an independent study music theory class during a special needs music class that met in an adjoining room, which also helped to inspire him.

While a college student, Pecar started an a cappella group called Hat Trick. With it he began the A Cappella for Autism fundraising concerts to benefit the Macomb/St. Clair chapter of Autism Society of America.

Pecar earned his first full-time teaching job at Chippewa Valley High School in 2013. When he first arrived, he learned choir students usually held an April concert. As April is Autism Awareness Month, he decided to create an A Cappella for Autism concert for his students. Pecar also won the 2015 Stephen Tsai award from the Autism Society of Michigan.

Last year's concert event raised almost $15,000 and this year's goal is $25,000.

The concerts will also feature a "miracle minute" in which students run through the crowd to see how many donations they can collect in 60 seconds, according to Pecar.

Door prizes and informative presentations about autism will be part of the event, including from the Autism Society of America Macomb/St. Clair Affiliate President Theresa Gabalis. Choir students have also done research on autism that they will share with the audience.

Donations of items and monetary contributions with a full tax benefit can be made to the event prior to April 1 by contacting Pecar at jpecar@cvs.k12.mi.us.

Tickets are available online at cvchoirs.seatyourself.biz for $10. Tickets first became available to the public on March 22.