



Dan Allen/Contributed Photo

Hermiston's Sandstone Middle School students take the stage at Carnegie Hall for a dress rehearsal ahead of their performance June 6, 2022.

# Students perform in famed music hall

Hermiston kids, teacher reminisce after returning from Carnegie Hall performance in New York

BY ERICK PETERSON

Hermiston Herald

Dan Allen has heard the joke.

Question: "How do you get to Carnegie Hall?"

Answer: "Practice, practice, practice."

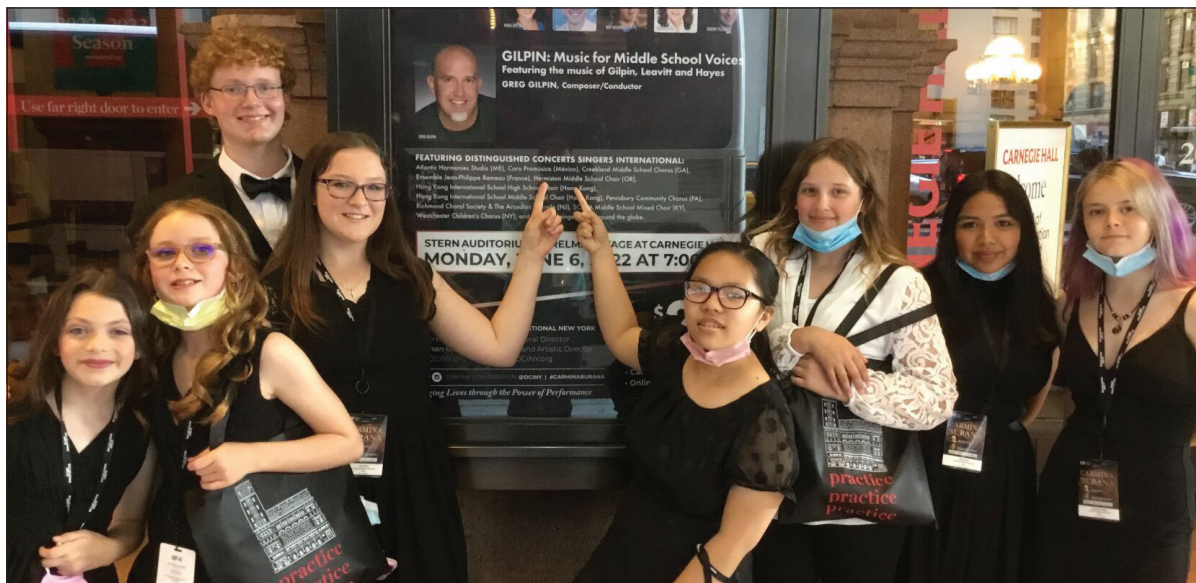
Allen is the director of bands at Sandstone Middle School in Hermiston. He rolled his eyes when he recently heard the Carnegie Hall story. For him, and his students, the Carnegie joke isn't just a silly gag; it's a reality.

He and a group of his students recently traveled to New York, New York, to perform at the famed music hall. The students sang under conductor Greg Gilpin on June 6.

After the students returned to Hermiston, Allen and his students said it really did take a lot of practice for them to be able to perform at Carnegie. They all said it was worth it, however, as they had a wonderful experience.

## A LONG TIME COMING

At the end of 2019, the SMS choir was nominated to perform alongside a few choirs from around the U.S. and one from Hong Kong. They were selected for this opportunity, but the pandemic put the kibosh on it happening when scheduled in 2020.



Hermiston students pose with a poster of their Carnegie Hall performance on June 6, 2022.

Dan Allen/Contributed Photo

By the time the concert was rescheduled, some of the choir students from Sandstone had moved on to Hermiston High School. Fortunately, for them, they were able to join students from their old school to make the New York trip and perform. And, like the middle school students, they had a memorable experience, according to their director and his students.

"It was fantastic," Allen said. "It was great for the kids to be nominated, audition and prove their worth. To be recognized along with schools from all over the country and the world as a program of outstanding caliber, at that level, that's just outrageous."

Nine students performed. They are Keely Burns, Marelly Chavez, Corine

Chen, Gracie Connell, Cord Cooley, Jared Crowther, Jaylee Hardy, Harmony Huntington and Mia Gardner.

They took a road trip to Portland, then flew to New York City. Including travel time, they were gone six days.

While in New York, the students had daily rehearsals, 8 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. In the afternoons, they would tour the area. They visited the Statue of Liberty, took a bus tour of New York City, paid respect at the National September 11 Memorial & Museum and more.

They went to Broadway to watch The Lion King, and they popped in on the Empire State Building, too.

"It was a really great combination," Allen said. "It was a business trip, and we were there for the performance, but

they left us with time to do some things with the kids that were really cool."

## HAVING A COOL TIME IN THE BIG APPLE

Back at their school, students reported that they did, in fact, have a wonderful time.

"It was really fun," Connell, 12, said.

She said she enjoyed being with her friends and singing at Carnegie Hall.

Burns, 11, said that the performance was memorable to her, too. Also, she said, the visit to the Statue of Liberty stood out on this trip.

Cooley, 13, stated that he had a good time, but that he felt tired. The flight was exhausting, he said, but he did enjoy the experience. He said he liked the Empire State Building best.

Chavez, 14, described the trip as "a new experience."

"It was a cool thing to cross off my bucket list," she said. She said she wants to go to many more places, including Europe, now.

Hardy, 12, said she liked meeting people from different places. Some of these people are new friends, she said, and she expressed the hope she would see them again.

## THE PERFORMANCE & THE NEXT STEP

Their teacher boasted of his students, saying they were terrific on the trip and excellent on stage.

As a musician, himself, he said a performance at Carnegie Hall is momentous. Watching them, he said, he was filled with pride. Then, another big moment came at the end when an usher pulled him out of the audience to take a bow with his kids.

"Now I can say that I've been on the same stage as the Beatles," he said, laughing.

Allen said Sandstone will return to Carnegie Hall.

"Once you've become an alumni and you've established your reputation with them, you're able to go back without jumping through all the hoops that we went through the first time," he said.

Nominations and auditions, then, are not required for another appearance.

"We're in a really good position," he said.

He added that he could simply pick up the phone and say that they'd like to perform again in 2025, and Sandstone would be welcomed for an encore.

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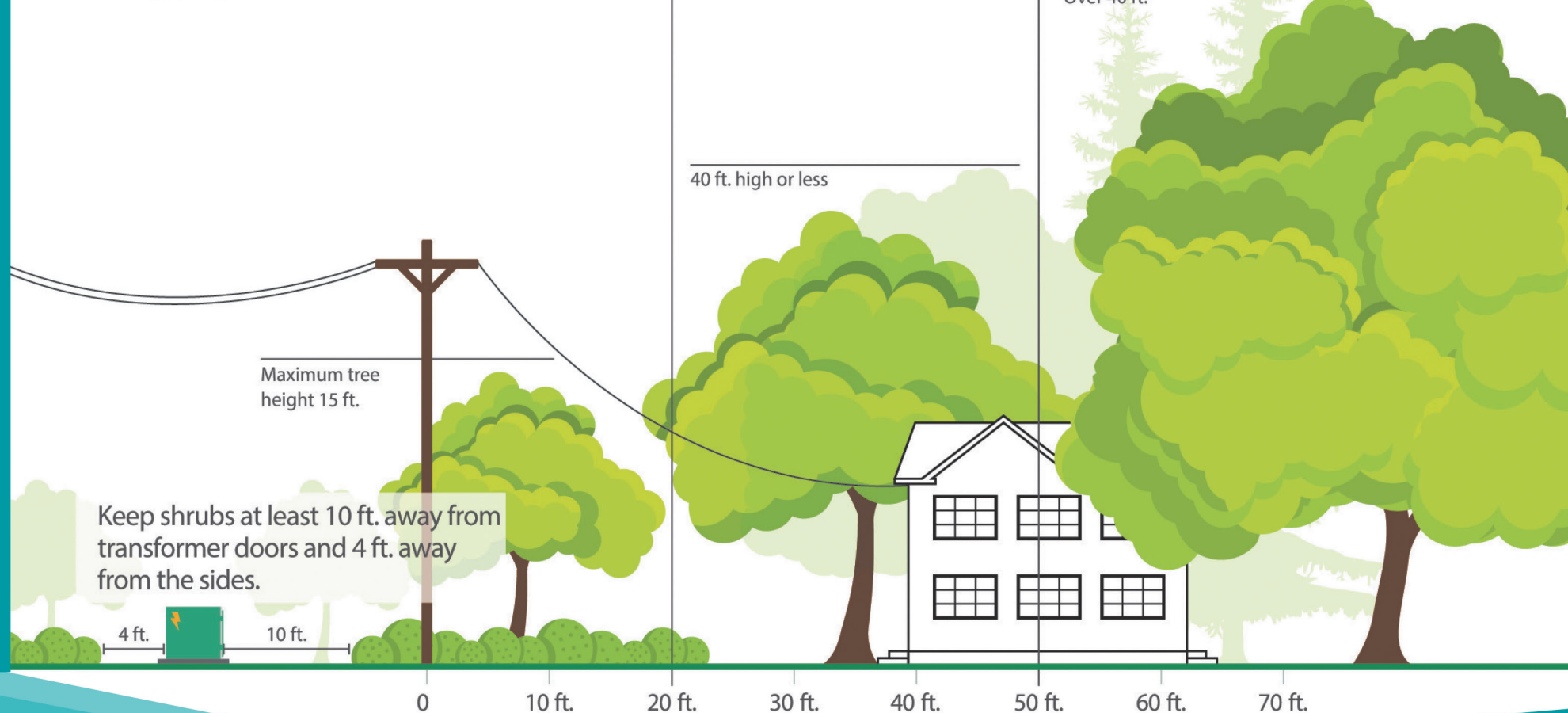
## MEDIUM TREE ZONE

Plant medium trees (under 40 ft. when mature) at least 25 ft. away from power lines.

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