

Music man gets new gig

LeMay teacher to lead Ragazzi youth choirs

By STEPHANIE QUEEN
Leader staff writer

The Ragazzi Children and Youth choirs expect to get some fresh faces this year but their conductor will be perhaps the newest of all.

Cody Talarico, LeMay Elementary School's music teacher, will be the new conductor for the two choirs' next year. He is replacing Tom Michalek, Ragazzi's founder.

"The thing I'm most looking forward to is working with students who are excited to sing and want to experience different types of music," Talarico said.

Ragazzi Children and Ragazzi Youth choirs are part of the Nebraska Children Chorus, which is under the Nebraska Choral Arts Society.

Ragazzi Children is a beginner choir for second through fourth grade singers, while Ragazzi Youth is an intermediate choir for fifth- through seventh-grade singers.

The Ragazzi choirs were created 12 years ago specifically for Bellevue children after the NCAS realized that a number of the children in Jubilate and Camerata, two other NCC choirs, were primarily from the Bellevue area. Students from all over are welcome into the Ragazzi choirs, although they practice at Avery Presbyterian Church in Bellevue.

Talarico accepted the position as the choirs' director about two weeks ago. In addition to teaching kindergarten through sixth-grade music at LeMay, he also directs the LeMay Handbell Choir and the LeMay Swing Corps, which combines the elements of swing choir with a hand drum/percussion ensemble.

For Ragazzi, "I hope to include some body percussion," Talarico said, such as clapping,

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— **Cody Talarico**
LeMay Elementary
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swaying and snapping fingers. Talarico grew up knowing he wanted to teach music but until he reached college, he didn't have a love of singing. He thinks it's great when children have a love of vocal music at such a young age.

"If kids know now that they like to sing, how much better can it get for them?" he said. "This is a great opportunity that the Omaha area has. My ultimate goal is that students have music in their lives somehow, for all of their lives. Ragazzi is great because the ones who want to sing will sing and sing and sing."

Monica Condon, a fourth grader at Two Springs Elementary, is starting her third year singing with Ragazzi Children. She said she joined the group because she has always enjoyed singing and thought it looked like a lot of fun.

"I'm really glad I did it," she said. "Being in the choir enabled me to get a lot of good opportunities."

One of those opportunities was a chance to participate in a touring production of "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat" when it stopped in Omaha at the Orpheum Theatre last summer.

The company asked the



Photo by Tony Miceli

LeMay Elementary music teacher Cody Talarico teaches a song to kindergarten students last Friday. His goal is for music to be part of every child's life.

NCAS for children to sing in the children's chorus and Michalek, the former director, recommended six children from Ragazzi to participate.

"It was pretty amazing that they got the opportunity and they wouldn't have gotten it without the choir," said Carol Ann Con-

don, Monica's mother.

For her last year in Ragazzi children, Monica, 9, is looking forward to working with Talarico.

"I just want to see what the new conductor is going to do and what pieces we'll sing," she said. "I'm just really up to it."