

KISSING STAK

Highlands music educator, Disney cast member goes the distance as inspiration to students

HARRISON

By REX RUTKOSKI
VALLEY NEWS DISPATCH

Mike Zeiler knows when he's found a good gig — or two or three.

And, it seems, his students and audiences couldn't be happier that he has.

No proverbial Johnny One Note, the Natrona Heights resident and native is singing, dancing and teaching his way through what is for him a most fulfilling life and career.

Those close to him suggest it couldn't happen to a more deserving person.

During the fall, winter and spring, Zeiler, 24, brings an enthusiastic approach to teaching general music education and serving as choral director at Highlands School District's Fawn and

Heights Elementary Schools. His choirs perform in two elementary productions a year and a variety of community events.

He also is choreographer for the high school show choir, Variations, and is co-producer of the spring musical.

He encourages each student to tap into his or her creativity and not be afraid to express himself or herself.

"I hope that the relationships students have formed with me helps to build their confidence and a passion for lifelong learning," he says.

He was awarded Allegheny County's Teacher of Excellence "Rising Star" his first year at Highlands. For his acceptance

speech at Carnegie Music Hall in Pittsburgh, he sang, "I Can Go the Distance" from the Disney movie "Hercules."

"It was my one chance in my life that I can officially say I sang at Carnegie Music Hall," he jokes.

"I love being able to bring the joy of music to everyone, anywhere," says Zeiler, a 2003 graduate of Highlands High School and a 2007 magna cum laude alumnus of Slippery Rock University. "I truly have the best job in the world!"

In the summers, Zeiler is a seasonal employee at Disney World in Orlando Fla., serving as a bell hop cast member at the Hollywood Tower of Terror attraction.

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Zeiler, who performs at Disney World in the summer, is an avid pin collector and displays them in his Fawn Elementary classroom.

Zeiler works on a musical skit with fifth-grade students Alexis Williams (left), 10, and Alexis Bengel, 11, at Fawn Elementary.

