

Youngsters get a kick out of Chautauqua

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Before he even walked on stage, Danny Butherus was in character. He sauntered through the aisle, greeting and tipping his worn cowboy hat to audience members.

As he began his performance, the 15-year-old eased into the life story of Will Rogers, the Western cowboy, comedian, writer and performer Butherus was portraying.

"I haven't never met a man I didn't like. Now a woman, that's a different story," Butherus said, playing up Rogers' sense of humor.

Butherus was the last performer at the morning session of the Young Chautauqua Scholars performances at the High Plains Chautauqua on Wednesday. The event included performances by 34 elementary, middle and high school students, most of them from around the Greeley area. Amelia Earhart, Georgia O'Keeffe and Albert Einstein were just a few of the of the famous people students impersonated.

Students who stepped up to perform weren't given school credit, and they did most of the researching, writing and rehearsing on their own time. A few training sessions were conducted by teachers and Chautauqua actors throughout the year to help students hone their acting skills.

Butherus said he has worked since December to prepare for his performance.

For many students, the motivation to research and work on their performance was rooted in their admiration for their chosen character.

"It's really cool that he still kept going after he was paralyzed. And he's Superman," said Zach Stevens, 12, about his character, Christopher Reeve.

Other students said they picked their characters because they had jobs the actors wanted to pursue in the future.

This year, event organizers focused on boosting minority participation with the help of a grant from The Community Foundation.

Some of the kids speak only Spanish at home, said Thelma Bear Edgerton, who helps organize the event. Thanks to the program they have vastly improved their English speaking skills, she said.

Carolyn Cron, whose granddaughter, Brenna Cron, was one of the actors, said she was impressed with all of the students' acting skills.

"My granddaughter is 13 and some of them are younger, but they were all excellent and (all of the monologues) were really well performed," she said.

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