

Loyola Blakefield students go on entertainment tour

Loyola Blakefield drama teacher Christian Garretson has long admired his school's commitment to summer service trips for students, but wanted to take it a step further.

"I was thinking of the Department of Defense tours, where Bob Hope would go out and do shows for the troops," Garretson said. "I always thought it would be good to do a service trip that was entertainment."

Using those old wartime shows for servicemen as an example, Garretson created "The Talent Tour" a year ago. The Towson school's rising senior theater players would perform for Baltimore and Philadelphia community organizations during a whirlwind five-day tour that mixes skit comedy with songs and dramatic performances.

Talent Tour proved to be such a big success that it returned this year with a new crop of talented Dons heading into their senior year. Starting June 6 at Gallagher Services, a Catholic Charities program in Timonium that works with people who have developmental needs, the Talent Tour was set to visit nursing homes, retired priests, organizations for homeless women and their families, and Head Start programs.

Seniors at Loyola Blakefield are expected to earn 75 hours of Christian service and the tour went a long way to meeting that goal for participants.

According to the students, it wasn't just about fulfilling requirements. It was about using talents to make people feel better, even for a second.

"With the Talent Tour, I'm helping people and enjoying helping the people," John Wontroop said. "It's a great experience."

During the hour-long performance at Gallagher Services, the Blakefield students mixed a brief comedic staging of Hamlet, a Foo Fighters song and an updated

version of Abbott and Costello's "Who's on First?" routine.

Afterward, energy among the students was high, but were they ready for the 13 ensuing shows?

"Considering the majority of us are really good friends outside of this, it's not that hard at all," Wontroop said.

Garretson warned: "It is so invigorating, but it is going to be tiring. We're in for it. We've got a bunch of shows in just a few days."

As they prepared to leave for their next performance, the Blakefield students began to sound like their USO counterparts from decades ago. The audience was providing the inspiration.

"They're people too and I enjoy seeing them smile," Judah Parham said of the Gallagher audience.

Added Zachary Montano: "Their laughter is so contagious. It's really great to see their enthusiasm."

To see the Blakefield students in action, visit CatholicReview.org/palmerblog.