

Move over, 'Glee.' Catholic show-choir invitational in its 37th year

FORT WAYNE, Ind. – Long before there was the hit television program “Glee,” Bishop Luers High School in Fort Wayne was laying the groundwork for show-choir invitionals.

The school’s 37th annual invitational, scheduled for March 4-5, is in a sense the “granddaddy” of all high school show-choir invitionals.

In 1975, Franciscan Father Fred Link, who directed the Bishop Luers Minstrels show choir and would later become principal of the Fort Wayne high school, was the founder of the Luers Midwest Show Choir Invitational. It consisted of seven area show choirs or swing choirs, as they were called then.

What made the Luers invitational unique was that it was an educational opportunity, with judges “who would come in and really help the groups and give them pointers on how to become better and what to do,” said Karlene Krouse, director of the Bishop Luers Minstrels show choir since 1999.

Before the invitational, Krouse recalled, most competitions were at community festivals or street fairs.

The Luers Midwest Show Choir Invitational was propelled into the national spotlight in 1976. A public television station in Bowling Green, Ohio, taped the show and made it available to PBS stations across the United States. In 1985, the public television program was aired throughout the former Soviet Union.

The invitational is now made available worldwide on the Web. Visitors to www.bishopluers.org can watch the Friday and Saturday competitions by clicking on “Luers Live” tab and then signing onto the live broadcast feed in partnership with Incommand Broadcasting. The fee is \$5 for the Friday program and \$10 for Saturday competitions.

The invitational will welcome 19 choirs March 5, including choirs from West

Virginia, Illinois, Ohio, southern Indiana and the Fort Wayne area. A middle school competition on the evening of March 4 will include three local public schools and a show choir from St. Joseph-St. Elizabeth School in Fort Wayne.

At the Luers invitational, “every student is recognized from an educational standpoint on their performance ability,” Krouse told Today’s Catholic, newspaper of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend.

Judges - called “adjudicators” - determine vocals, sound, choreography, performance and the general picture. Other judges focus on soloists or recognize the best woodwind, percussion, keyboard, technical crew, string and dynamic performers in a show.

Krouse believes that “Glee,” about a high school glee club, has increased the popularity of show choir, “but the sad part about the show, it does not show the hard work that goes behind the scenes to get to the performance level that these students do.”

“It doesn’t show how (the students) are juggling two sports, all their academics, their (Advanced Placement) courses and really the nuts and bolts of a show choir,” she added.

Bishop Luers offers show choir as an accredited course. During the competition season, the Luers show choir enters six to eight competitions and a national competition every other year.

The show choir practices three or four times a week, four to eight hours per week, and when the season is over, they continue to practice once a week.

“You find with students getting involved with show choir that it’s a lot of work, but it’s not any more work than being in a sport,” Krouse said.

For a school of 540 students, the show choir boasts an illustrious history. Last year, the show choir took a sixth-place national listing and ranks in the top 23 this year.

One of the most rewarding things about show-choir students, Krouse said, is seeing an individual transform from a student who was quiet and shy into a positive,

confident performer and “has the best time.”

As a show-choir parent, as well as a director, Monica Zwick said, “I like the camaraderie you have with a lot of parents – a lot more than with the sports.”

Parents take the roles of feeding the show-choir students during competitions, helping with costumes, hair and makeup, loading the trucks for competitions and manning booths at school and community fundraisers. Many parents have assigned tasks for the invitational as well.

“It is a great, great opportunity for parents and students to be working together,” Krouse said. “Students also see their parents in a volunteer role in something that they love. I think that’s one thing about Bishop Luers, that we really give a great example to these young men and women of service to our community.”