

Children's theater tours bases in Germany

BY LISA HORN

Stars and Stripes

WIESBADEN, Germany — Putting on a musical in five days may be a stretch for most actors and directors, but for the Missoula Children's Theater, it's all part of a week's work.

The Missoula, Mont.-based troupe, with the help of local children, is producing "Red Riding Hood" throughout April and May at military communities in Germany. Last week, it had teams in Wiesbaden and Stuttgart.

This version of "Red Riding Hood," developed specifically for the Missoula group, adds some new twists to the old fairy tale. It introduces Robin Hood as Red Riding Hood's cousin, and the Big Bad Wolf as the wrongly accused.

During the year, the theater will send out 27 teams to coordinate approximately 900 performance workshops for more than 55,000 young performers in all 50 states, Canada, Europe, South America and Asia.

The formula is the same for each workshop: Auditions and cast are selected on Mondays, with rehearsals beginning immediately and continuing each day from 3:30 to 8 p.m. until Saturday, when the curtains rise for family and friends to see the final results.

In Wiesbaden, 116 children in



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Red Riding Hood, played by Lilah Solo, left, tries to get her basket back from the Three Little Pigs during a rehearsal of the Missoula Children's Theater production of "Red Riding Hood" in Wiesbaden, Germany. The Three Little Pigs are played by, left to right, Elizabeth Harns, Erin Duke and Annalise Hurst.

kindergarten through 12th grade auditioned on Monday.

With only 55 slots for performers and student directors, it was a daunting task, said tour actor/directors Melissa Deutsch and

Heather Heintz.

"Actually it's pretty easy to pick the kids that stand out and put them in the right parts," said Deutsch, who majored in theater in college.

their stage fright. For example eighth-grader Lilah Solo, who played Red Riding Hood, had a small part in last year's production of "Sleeping Beauty."

"It seems like it's impossible to get it all done in five days, but we're always able to do it," she said. "If you're interested in acting, you should just try it. You never know what part you might get."

Events that bring military families together, such as the Missoula Children's Theater, are important now more than ever, Heintz said. Theater can help to take children's minds off a deployed mom or dad or fitting into a new school, she added.

"It's hard for kids to move from America to another country all of a sudden," Heintz said. "For us to come here, it's kind of comforting [for them]."

"It's not so much making kids into actors, it's giving them self-confidence."

There are several remaining stops on the tour, sponsored by Morale, Welfare and Recreation: Mannheim and Illesheim, Monday through Saturday; Babenhausen and Kitzingen, April 26-May 1; Baumholder and Schweinfurt, May 3-8; Giessen, May 10-15; Hanau and Hohenfels, May 17-22; and Bamberg and Vilseck, May 24-29.

"But this time we had a really tough time. [The children] were all outgoing and ... loud."

For many of the performers, acting in past Missoula productions has helped them get over

E-mail Lisa Horn at: hornl@mail.estripes.osd.mil