

RP Student Theatre celebrates 10 years

By JAMIE CARPENTER
Contributor

River Place Student Theatre presented its tenth musical production "The Lion King, Jr." in the spring, marking its ten-year milestone.

"The fact that an arts-related nonprofit has survived for ten years is impressive," said Ivonne Mercado, RPST president. "We do more than produce a Broadway quality show made up entirely of elementary students, we also bring the community together... and serve as the creative spark and launching pad for many of our area's talented youth."

River Place Student Theatre was originally formed to simply put on an elementary school play. When the state legislature cut education funding in 2011, fine arts took the biggest hit in Leander ISD schools. Elementary music and theatre classes were combined into one and arts educator positions were cut. RPST helped bridge the arts funding gap

– providing students more than 84 hours of musical theatre instruction in six months each year.

River Place Elementary was new then and parents were eager to build a meaningful theatre program. From day one, founders Gene Fruge and Kimberly Ohlson set the standard for excellence high, Mercado said.

"RPST sets high standards for its students and is the artistic launch pad and feeder program for FPMS and VHS," Ohlson said. "I've seen RPST student Hailey Hill grow up and become a VHS choir state champion and my own child, Bailey Ohlson, become a VHS band all state contender and 4A state marching champion."

Kara Weedman, six-year RPST parent and former board member, said: "As a parent, it is truly awesome to look back and see how one small role in an elementary school production not only affected my life, but also created a path and a 'place' for my kids and so



"Beauty and the Beast"



"Aladdin"

Photos by Karen
Robshaw Peterson

many other students."

Dionn Schaffner, RPST's creative director for the past seven years, "gives students the creative freedom to allow them to make their characters their own," Mercado said.

Any student zoned to River Place Elementary may participate in RPST's program. Student scholarships are made possible by corporate sponsors in-

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"Little Mermaid"

