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The Redskin Singers perform recently in the James Maskus Auditorium at Liberal High School. Courtesy photo

By RACHEL COLEMAN • Leader & Times Liberal High School's Redskin Singers have performed all over town — the National Anthem at athletic events, Christmas concerts at nursing homes, and for company parties and civic clubs. Next month, the 18-member group will sing at 30-plus venues, delivering Singing Valentines.

But they've never performed on a passenger train.

That might change when the group heads to Los Angeles on Amtrak's Southwest Chief in March. The Redskin Singers are scheduled to perform at Disneyland and possibly other venues, said vocal music instructor Tony Claus, who noted the trip accomplishes several goals.

"It's a great tool to get the kids out to see other performing groups like ours and professional ones as well. When we do this, they see that what we're asking them to do is the same as what everyone else has to do to be successful at the upper levels of music," he said. "It makes a big difference that they see it for themselves, as opposed to watching it on television."

Such trips also serve as "a great recruiting tool for Liberal," Claus said. "It's a way to get people to see the best and brightest of Liberal."

At this stage, though, the trip means a lot of hard work for the students, said Kim Hay, parent of Redskin Singer Shelby Hay. Thirty years ago, she said, high school concerts carried an admission price that served to offset the cost of such trips.

"Now, they've got to raise their own money," she said. So far, "They've raised about a third of what they need, and between now and the end of March they've got to earn another \$10,000," she said. "We've gotten such a positive response from local businesses and individuals, and we're really counting on the community to support the kids."

Vocal music should be a point of pride in USD 480, Hay said, "because it's the only fine arts elective available to students all the way through. They start in elementary school and have instruction in intermediate and middle school. So the kids who end up in Redskin Singers have really put in the time and the practice through the years. Redskin Singers is the culmination of all that hard work."

This year's Redskin Singers roster includes Clarissa Carillo, Erica Fowler, Jamie Fitzgerald, Shelby Hay, Sanni Bowen, Lauren Sarchet, Flor Parral, Elena Devora, Kass Rosales, Juan Carlos Contrera, Nick Moore, Dylan Holt, Miguel Rodriguez, Jimmy Bert, Giovanni Macedo, Dylan Hamre, Jared Hall and Luis Morales. Donna Apsley is the group's accompanist.

Additional effort of a different sort will be required of the Redskin Singers when they sponsor a garage sale Feb. 5 at the Liberal High School cafeteria. As their departure date nears, they'll also take care of clean-up after the KSCB radio home show, and host a meal and drawing for a variety of donated items.

The auction will offer original artwork by Liberal artists Sandra Koochel, Jo Scoby, Gary Marsh and Diane Marsh, items from Seward County Community College's athletics department, and more. Among the prizes waiting to be claimed are numerous items autographed by country singer Jerrod Niemann — shirts, boots, hats, snow globe and even a guitar signed by the rising star.

"He's a former Redskin Singer who grew up in Liberal, so he has a special interest in encouraging the kids," Hay said, "And I think it's neat for them to know that he's become so successful."

That standard of success also infuses Claus' perspective on the fundraising efforts.

"It is a lot of money, but it isn't daunting," he said. "We've had so much support from local companies, like Pizza Hut, which has set up a program for us to sell coupons, and McDonald's, which let us sell 'Smile' cards. We do a little at a time, and it adds up."

Claus applied a similar strategy to the trip's organization.

"Flying was not an option," he said. "I started to look at how much it was going to cost to travel there [by bus] and the price of stopping to stay in a hotel — or having the kids sleep on the bus — and I thought, 'maybe the train would be better.' They have group rates so it's kind of a slick deal, you don't have to worry about restroom stops with a group — you just get on there and keep going."

It's Claus' hope that, given the time they've devoted to vocal music, and the inspiration that can result from the trip to Los Angeles, the Redskin Singers will do the same: start their journey as serious musicians, and keep going.

To schedule Singing Valentines with the Redskin Singers, call the Liberal High School music department at 604-1274.

ALL ABOARD for the REDSKIN SINGERS

Feb. 5 – Garage Sale at Liberal High School cafeteria

Feb. 14 – Redskin Singers deliver Singing Valentines, \$40, \$50 or \$60 sessions.

March – Drawing event and prize awards, date to be announced

Ongoing – Redskin Singers sell \$15 coupons for Pizza Hut pizzas, any size, any topping.

Ongoing – Tickets on sale for drawing, \$1 each, available from Redskin Singers.

Ongoing – Bids accepted for donated works by local artists.

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