

Students at Rice Strut Their Stunts

By WENDY MITMAN
Free Press Staff Writer

There was a full moon in Burlington Friday night. Fog rolled through the night as ghoulish cadavers staggered from behind tombstones and lurched through the dark.

Who'd they have to call? Ghostbusters!

No, it was not Halloween the day after Thanksgiving. It was not even a movie. It was Rice Memorial High School's 56th annual Stunt Night, which will happen again tonight at 8, and the freshmen were strutting their stuff — or "moonwalking" it Michael Jackson style — across the stage as the opening act at Memorial Auditorium in Burlington.

The freshman class was vying with the sophomores, juniors and seniors for first prize in the competition to be awarded after tonight's performance. The trophy, which will be engraved with the names of the winning classes, offers class prestige.

"The class of 1983 won the past three years, so this year everybody is really going for it," said school Principal Philip Soltau. "The competition is wide open. About 450 students out of a possible 560 are participating."

"Psyched?" he asked a purple people eater as she ran down the stairs to assemble with the other freshmen in the basement of the auditorium.

"Oh yeah! Freshmen are gonna win!" she answered.

"This place was really rocking last night, dress rehearsal night," Soltau said.

Stunt Night began in 1929 at what was then Cathedral High School as Vaudeville Night, an evening of entertainment to raise money for uniforms for the softball team. In 1932 the name was changed to Stunt Night and the tradition was established.

Soltau said about 1,800 tickets were sold for Friday and 2,500 for tonight, a sellout. The proceeds go to the school's general fund.

Each class is helped by about 15 coaches, mostly alumni and friends, who choose the theme of the class' show. Ron Corey, a 1950 graduate of Rice, has been involved in the show since high school and is this year's

technical coordinator.

Jim Provost, a graduate of Rice and now a football coach at the school and a Stunt Night coach for the freshmen, explained the coaches start meeting in July and August to discuss themes.

"We get serious by early September," he said in the basement of Memorial Auditorium before the show. "Each class has 19 rehearsals in three weeks before the show and one dress rehearsal Thanksgiving night. That's the first and only time they get to see the other classes' acts."

A young man clad in a T-shirt and grass skirt hovered anxiously near Provost and finally broke in, saying, "I can't find my shorts!"

"Well, I hope you didn't forget them," called Provost as the youth darted off. "It's very competitive," Provost said. "But the best thing about it is that it's not like sports competition. It's class against class, and everybody has a great time and everybody is happy."

Each class may perform an unlimited number of skits within a 30-minute period. The students are judged each night by a different panel of five judges. They receive points for talent, costumes, scenery and the flow of the theme.

This year's themes are:

- Seniors — "1984, The Final Chapter," in which, according to the program, "Big Brother takes a vacation leaving his Little Brother in charge who discovers that the unique individuality of each one of us makes the world a better place."

- Juniors — "Color Our World," where the dullness of black and white are brightened by colors and the world is a happier place through beauty and love.

- Sophomores — A salute to Walt Disney.

- Freshmen — The Twilight Zone, based on rock star Jackson's "Thriller" video.

"It's a great way for people to get to know each other, especially the freshmen," Provost said. "I remember how nervous I was when I first participated. When it was over I knew everybody."

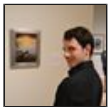


Free Press Photos by TERRY JOHN

Rice Memorial High School student Melissa Villanti is the Disney character Tinkerbell in the Sophomore Class presentation, A Salute to Walt Disney, during the school's annual Stunt Night at Memorial Auditorium in Burlington Friday. Above, Tony Ouellette is dressed as the Wizard for the Junior Class performance, titled 'Color Our World.' The show will be repeated tonight.

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Sun, Dec 3, 2017