



Schmidt



Dagati



Stanley



Mace



Singer



Lesko



Thompson



Pozzi

Chippewa Valley, Dakota actors nominated for awards

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CLINTON TOWNSHIP/MACOMB TOWNSHIP — To put everything on the line and perform on stage is an immense task. To be recognized for it is an immense feeling.

A total of eight student actors from Chippewa Valley Schools were noticed for their performances throughout the year with nominations for the 2024 Sutton Foster Awards, held on June 1 at the Wharton Center in East Lansing.

“The Sutton Foster Awards act as the Michigan high school Tonys, in a way; the Tonys being the Broadway awards show,” said Christian Boni, Dakota High School drama director. “The Sutton Foster Awards are like that for all of the high schools in Michigan. To win the Sutton Foster Awards, because they have one male first-place winner and one female first-place winner, whoever wins has the chance to participate in the Jimmy Awards, which takes place in New York and has two competitors from each state in the United States compete.”

The nomination process for the Sutton Foster Awards begins with the show itself. Schools register with the awards to have adjudicators attend and scout actors during performances. Adjudicators nominated Dante Dagati and Lauren Singer for their roles in Dakota's production of "Mamma Mia!" Chippewa Valley High School's nominees included Owen Thompson, Abigail Schmidt, Evannah Stanley and Maro Lesko for "The SpongeBob Musical," along with Gavin Mace and Taylor Pozzi for "Little Women."

Once the actors are nominated, work begins to prepare for a workshop weekend held at sites in East Lansing and Detroit. At the workshop, actors practice performances with song and dance routines different from their nominating performance, all leading up to the final awards showcase.

"It's definitely a lot of stuff that is put on you in such a short amount of time, but once you get past all that and nail it, it's really a lot of fun," said Schmidt, a senior. "It's a good challenge and it's nice to see other people enjoying the same things as you are."

It is at the final showcase where two students, one boy and one girl, are crowned as the best high school actors in Michigan. While Chippewa Valley has been close to winning in the past, the district's contingent left the 2024 awards empty-handed. But getting to the awards is a massive feat in itself, which district theater staff recognizes.

"We're immensely proud of our students," said James Pecar, the district's director of choral activities. "This is a big project and it takes a lot of courage and professionalism, and they've done a fantastic job navigating their lives as students and performers. We're really proud of them."

The awards are named after Sutton Foster, a Broadway actress and two-time Tony Award winner. Foster won the Best Actress in a Musical award in 2002 for the role of Millie Dillmount in "Thoroughly Modern Millie" and in 2011 for the role of Reno Sweeney in "Anything Goes."

Foster was a resident of Troy prior to beginning her theatrical career.