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Mr. Easthampton event hopes to bring out superhero in everyone

By CATHERINE BAUM
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EASTHAMPTON - Mr. Easthampton - an event so popular people were turned away at the door last year - presents a cast of real people Friday: athletes and drama fiends, band members and skateboarders, cartoonists and bookworms.

"It's a diverse group of kids and it's really brought a lot of unity amongst them," said Easthampton High School teacher and Mr. Easthampton adviser Nancy Dunn.

The event has gained momentum since it started three years ago. It moves this year from the high school's little theatre, which seats 120 people, to the White Brook Middle School auditorium, which seats 300 people. Show time is 7 p.m. Friday.

Half of the seats have been sold during school lunches and in the school's main office as of Tuesday morning. Tickets are \$8 at the door or \$6 in advance and can be purchased at the main office by calling 529-1585.

Performing Friday are juniors Tyler Mijencka, Alex Graham, Steven Lablanc, Boshan Zhag, RJ Pause; and seniors Kyle Gagnon, Nate Santana, Corey Lauchmen and Wesley LaValley.

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CAROL LOLLIS

Sanders Dixon, 17, of Easthampton, practices a move during a Mr. Easthampton rehearsal at Easthampton High school Thursday afternoon.



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Part serious competition and part campy fun, the young men will be evaluated in talent, superhero,

formal wear presentation and a question and answer session. There also will be a few surprise categories - including "best BS artist" and best legs. Judges and Easthampton High School faculty Rose Guerra, Tom Baird, Carol Griggs and 2008 Mr. Easthampton Christopher Barron will crown this year's winner.

Contestant interest was also unusually high this year, moving Dunn to limit participants to juniors and seniors.

"We originally had 20 kids with freshman and sophomores; there were so many kids," Dunn said. "It's becoming more of a competition for real talent and it actually promotes itself now."

The event, which allows the community to recognize the individual and group talents of young Easthampton men, will begin with a dance that is the only collaborative performance.

The nine competitors lined up next to each other in the high school cafeteria last week during their first rehearsal under the direction of drama teacher Tom Smith. "It's Raining Men" began to play as the group followed Smith's lead in their opening number. The teenagers laughed and became closer to performing in unison with each attempt.

Organizers hope the audience will laugh, too.

"The audience isn't seeing strangers up there they're seeing people they know," Smith said. "The energy created there is really huge."

While contestants dress in their formal clothes backstage, a six-minute video will be shown of six public service announcements created by students in the school's Students Against Destructive Decision club. The announcements are about the dangers of drinking and driving during prom and graduation season.

Dunn, who is the club's adviser, said she expects some of the clips to win awards in the state Executive Office of Public Safety and Security's 2009 "Dance Don't Chance" campaign. Contest results are set to be released Friday. Each contestant will give a brief biography, including his hobbies, future plans and one interesting fact about himself, during the formal wear portion of the show.

After explaining who they really are, contestants will transform into the superhero they wish to be. They will introduce their superhero and reason behind their choice. Hercules, Captain America and Barack Obama are set to make an appearance. There will also be a variety of song and dance performances, including comedian Chris Farley's infamous Chip & Dale skit.

Some contestants make up their own personal vision of a superhero, like Jeremy Boyle, who in the first Mr. Easthampton contest dressed in a tutu and threw candy to the audience as The Candy Man.

Easthampton High School math teacher Paul Peelle inspired the creation of superhero "Banana Peelle," to be presented Friday by junior Steve Lablanc. Lablanc said he'd only participate in Mr. Easthampton on the condition he could be "Banana Peelle."

"He's one of my superheroes," Lablanc said of his algebra teacher. "I love seeing what they come up with for superhero," said Jenn Lavallee, 18, who will emcee the event with her classmate Patrick Connelly.

They're all superheroes to someone.

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