

Skylar Astin wows aspiring performers at CR South

By Chris English Staff Writer | Posted: Sunday, August 4, 2013 12:00 am



Sitting among 119 other aspiring performers and soaking in every word from movie, stage and television star Skylar Astin, 14-year-old Megan Kirk couldn't help but think ... maybe that could be her some day.

"I could sit there and listen to him to talk forever," said Megan, a Middletown resident and Neshaminy High School freshman. "It's weird to think he was once as young as us and trying to figure out what to do with his life. So yeah, hopefully, I can do something like that."

Astin's Friday appearance at Council Rock High School South in Northampton was part of a weeklong program at the school called Broadway Break Thru Summer Intensive 2013.

For \$495, the 120 children and young adults ages 8 through 23 received comprehensive instruction from professionals on singing, dancing, acting and other aspects of the performing arts. As part of the program, they put together their own movies,

musicals or plays and performed them at the end of the week.

Astin was greeted Friday by screams from the younger girls and then settled down to talk about his career and give advice via a free-flowing interview with Broadway Break Thru owner and professional casting director David Petro. Astin then took about 20 questions from participants and signed autographs.

"We all get nervous, but we all love this or we wouldn't be here," said the 25-year-old Astin, when asked how he felt before his first performance in front of a large audience.

"I actually get more nervous doing stuff like this, when I'm just trying to be myself and leave you all with something inspiring, than I do when I'm playing someone else," he continued.

Astin grew up in Rockland County, N.Y., near New York City and now lives in Los Angeles. He is perhaps best known for his prominent movie role in last year's musical comedy "Pitch Perfect." He has also appeared in the movies "21 and Over" and "Hamlet 2." Plus, he was one of the stars in "Spring Awakening" on Broadway and has made appearances on "House" and other TV shows.

Astin will be one of the stars in the new TV series "Ground Floor," premiering in the fall on TBS.

"I wanted to play baseball, but I just wasn't good enough, so I had to get real with myself," he said. "At one time or another, I guess I wanted to be a lot of things — astronaut, therapist, whatever — but once I got bitten by the (performance) bug, there was nothing else I could imagine myself doing."

Develop a thick skin, Astin advised his audience.

"I'm very proud of a lot of the things I've done, especially 'Pitch Perfect,' but it never gets easy," he said. "You have to be open to do anything and learn not to take criticism, rejection and other things personally."

Cameron Flurry, 10, was impressed.

"He was very funny and I learned a lot, and I've learned a lot all week," said the fifth-grader at Newtown Elementary School.

Newtown Township resident Lisa Dechristofaro, at 23, the oldest of those attending the CR South program, said she was taking dental hygiene courses at Montgomery County Community College when she decided to return to her first love, entertainment. She wants to sing on Broadway or on television one day.

"Skylar was awesome and such an inspiration," she said. "He comes off as such a normal person, not corrupted by fame."

"I think the message is if you work hard enough and have the passion, anything is possible," said Malcom Zelaya, 15, a Bronx, N.Y., resident who attends George School in Middletown.



So far this summer, the Broadway Break Thru Summer Intensive program has made weeklong stops at two cities in Michigan and in Boston and Chicago before arriving at CR South, said Petro. The main goal of the program is to “give every student all the industry tools needed to succeed,” he said.

Even if the attendees don’t end up in some phase of the performing arts, the program, which ran Monday to Saturday, can help them with self-confidence, self-expression and verbal and interview skills, said Petro.

The CR South stop came about when Kristina Tuxhorn, owner of the BC Discoveries Dance and Theater Arts Company in Newtown Township, saw a Broadway Break Thru video from last summer, contacted Petro and convinced him to bring the program to the school after getting approval from Council Rock

officials.

“All the teachers are professionals and I really do think everyone gets a lot out of it,” said Tuxhorn.

