



VOICE RECOGNITION

The Newark Boys Chorus School begins 2016–17 on a high note.

By Kelly-Jane Cotter

When the current school year began for students at Newark Boys Chorus School, they found themselves not in a classroom, but at Frost Valley Camp in New York. At a campground nestled in the Catskills, the boys spent three days together, getting to know one another better and becoming accustomed to all their voices.

“The first thing the kids in sixth- to eighth-grade do is go to camp for team-building and voice lessons,” explains Head of School Richard Willett. “It gets them away and lets them focus on the year ahead.”

And what a year it should be. The students will continue to hone their voices as part of the school’s concert chorus, learning a mixed repertoire of classical, jazz, soul, spirituals and contemporary music. They will perform 40 concerts throughout New Jersey and New York, as well as in Baltimore and Georgia. Local fans will get an opportunity to hear them December 19, at the school’s annual Holiday Concert.

In their first week of school, the boys are traveling to the



9/11 memorial in Shanksville, PA—where Flight 93 crashed after passengers fought back against the terrorists—to perform at the commemoration of the 15th anniversary of the September 11 attacks.

“The White House asked us to perform,” Willett says.

The students may well be invited elsewhere throughout the school year. Last year, the chorus traveled to Niagara Falls, Toronto and Chicago, where they performed and went sightseeing. Yet it’s not all travel and adventure, fun

and games—even when it might seem that way to the kids themselves. The students are learning all the time, even when they’re laughing and singing.

“It’s a discipline—you can’t spend half your day in music lessons and not profit from that,” he maintains. The rewards, he adds, come not only in musical proficiency, but in other academic areas, as well as in character-building. “Music is an extremely precise science. I don’t know if they appreciate at a very early age that it’s helping them with math, but it does.



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“You’re part of a choral team, so there is teamwork involved in school every day,” Willett continues. “There is teamwork in their academic subjects as well. They progress in terms of budgeting their time, and in perseverance.”

Newark Boys Chorus School, which traditionally served boys in grades five through eight, is expanding this year to include fourth grade, for a student body totaling about 50 children.

“We don’t require any formal training,” says Brenda McLeod, Director of Administration and Admissions. “Every individual has the capability of having vocal talent, and if we get them at a very early age, their voices are more pliable and they can learn easily.”

Students are recruited mainly from Newark and surrounding communities. Tuition is \$3,000, and most students qualify for scholarships. The Newark Boys Chorus School is proud of its academics as well as its music department. The school runs an innovative STEAM program, which incorporates hands-on learning and problem-solving in key fields such as science, technology, engineering, art and math.

“What we emphasize in academics is exactly the same as in the music program,” Willett says. “Individual performance, teamwork, recitation, competition and demonstration. When these kids leave here their lives have changed.” 

