

Lights. Faith.

Building a Local Theatre Family

By Zoey Nettles



Lydia Weatherly's journey in theatre began long before she directed a production in Lake City. Now a sophomore in college studying theatre education, Lydia, 19, has been partaking in community theatre since she was 11 years old. However, she credits her passion for the performing arts to her dad, Glen, the head pastor at the Lake City Church of the Nazarene.



"My dad was a background actor in Hollywood in the 90s," Lydia said. "He was an extra for Full House, Fresh Prince of Bel-Air, Seinfeld and all those classic sitcoms that most people watched back then."



Action.



Lydia
Weatherly

While Glen Weatherly was pursuing an acting career, he participated in musical productions at his church and formed a theatre group with his church friends. Since then, he continued his work in theatre as a pastor, helping produce plays at his previous churches in Oregon, Illinois, and Florida.

When Lydia and her family settled down in Lake City at the end of 2021, she noticed that there wasn't a large community theatre group. Her passion for the performing arts would not be diminished, and so she decided to open a business that would allow her to do just that.

It was during her junior year of high school in 2023 that Lydia founded her traveling princess company, Practically Perfect Party Co. This opportunity allowed her to not only be her own boss but also fulfill her lifelong passion for performing.

"My best friend of four years now was my Elsa, and I was Anna, and we always did princess parties together," Lydia said. "It was really fun to get to partner with different businesses and make those magical moments."

With the help of her dad, she found other outlets for her creativity through theatre groups based out of Lake Butler and High Springs. There, she was able to perform in multiple productions throughout high school including *Grease*, *Shrek*, and *Peter Pan*.

When she graduated high school in 2024 and moved to college, however, she had to put a pause on Practically Perfect Party Co.

In college, Lydia has been able to grow her theatre knowledge and experience exponentially. Through the Adonai Arts Academy in Nashville, she has been able to gain experience

They chose three Bible verses to accompany their three values for the group: Character over Competition, based on Romans 12:2; Excellence over Ego, based on Philippians 4:8; and Service over Spotlight, based on Ephesians 5:1-2.

"Our mission is to build relationships through the arts, nurture God-given



creativity, cultivate storytelling, and deliver exceptional performances that inspire and engage," Lydia said.

With the ability to use the Lake City Church of the Nazarene as a venue to get them started, they

in producing, tech, and even assistant directing through productions like *Finding Nemo Jr.*, *Frozen Jr.*, and *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

During her college breaks and time at home, she began thinking about a new opportunity.

"My dad and I had always kind of thought about starting a theatre group in Lake City," Lydia said. "So this year we finally decided to go for it." And so, Practically Perfect Performing Arts was born.

just needed to decide on what their first production would be. Growing up, Lydia and her family loved visiting Animal Kingdom and watching the production of *Finding Nemo: The Musical*. With a shared passion for the show and Lydia's experience as an assistant director for a Nashville production of *Finding Nemo Jr.*, that became the obvious choice.

With the incredible support of their family and their church, they began production, set to perform June 26–29. With a cast of more than 20 kids

and a crew consisting of multiple volunteers, this production had the support it needed. With the care and compassion through which Lydia and her family put together this show, it is no surprise that every single night was sold out.



Further cultivating a passion for art in their students, Lydia's mom helped run and organize the "Nemo Art Gallery" that took place in the lobby on the performance nights. This gave students and community members the opportunity to submit art to be on display.

The show itself consisted of a professional level of production items that were largely made by hand. These included 155 light cues designed by Lydia, 55 costumes, 18 unique hair and makeup designs, three hand-built set locations—including the coral reef, the Big Blue, and P. Sherman's dentist office—39 immersive sound and music cues, 28 puppets, and 50 props that all worked together to tell this amazing story.

"I love seeing the kids' reactions to everything, like when they saw the set or when we got the stage installed; they all thought it was so cool," Lydia said. "And when they got microphones and were able to be in the spotlight, it really made them feel special."

When designing the costumes, Lydia worked with her crew and began drawing out ideas inspired by different decades that the kids and crew loved.

For the sets, they were grateful to have a team of church volunteers who enjoyed carpentry to help build them all by hand. They even had a local artist, Erin Benz, hand-paint a beautiful ocean backdrop. A portion of it has since been on display in the Gateway Art Gallery window.



"The amazing thing was that everything was done by volunteers, and it was just amazing how people took the time out of their day to help," Lydia said. "It definitely is a passion project, and I hope we can continue to see families come together and our space growing and just become a staple in Lake City."

Lydia reflected on running the lighting cues and being able to watch the show every night with her headset on and the backstage crew talking to her through it.

"I got to see the audience watch their kids, or people watch theatre for the first time ever," Lydia said. "It's just so cool to see everyone experience it in a way that's memorable for them... seeing parents smiling because they've never seen their kids sing a solo before and taking pictures... that's definitely my favorite memory from it."



Since the success of *Finding Nemo Jr.*, Practically Perfect Performing Arts has launched their first theatre camp that took place during mid-July. "Under The Sea Musical Theatre Intensive" allowed students to learn foundational skills in acting, singing, and movement over a 5-day period, resulting in a final performance for their families at the conclusion. Featuring selections from Disney's *The Little Mermaid*, students participated in vocal workshops, choreography sessions, ensemble scene work, and more.

With this being another successful venture, supported by the success of their first production, they are planning to continue offering camps like these to students ages 7 to 18. Other productions are also in the works with *A Charlie Brown*

Christmas coming this winter with the possibility of a dessert dining theatre. In the future, Lydia expressed a desire to host a production open to all ages, in order to open the world of theatre to anyone who is interested.

"The heart behind theatre is just to really build relationships like our mission says," Lydia said. "We're just a family that wants to welcome more families and to share our passion in a place that doesn't get to see it often."

If anyone is interested in getting involved with future productions from Practically Perfect Performing Arts, they can stay updated on their Facebook page, where you can also find the link to their website: practicallyperfectpa.wixsite.com/home. ■