

Caledon girl in the National Ballet's The Nutcracker

By Bill Rea

The National Ballet of Canada's traditional holiday offering of The Nutcracker has a Caledon connection this year.

ValleyWood resident Gwendolyn Gilmer, 8, is one of the performers, dancing as one of the lambs in the production.

Tchaikovsky's classic ballet is being performed at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts in Toronto.

Gwendolyn has been dancing for three years and this is her first time performing at this level.

"I really like the costumes," she said. "It makes me happy when I dance. Very happy."

Her father Chris said the opening performances was Friday, and it was a special event for charitable causes, like Make a Wish.

He added there will be performances just about every day up to the end of the year.

He recalled his daughter was among 300 young dancers trying out about three years ago, performing for a panel of judges. That group was narrowed down to 60 and Gwendolyn was among those to be accepted into the Associate program of the National Ballet School of Canada.

"She's always had this little passion for dancing, ever since she could walk," he said.

Gilmer added the next step will be getting into the actual school as a resident, but that can't happen until she's at least 11 and in Grade 6 (she's currently in Grade 3 at Herb Campbell Public School).

The performances also allows performers to interact with the audience in the lobby.

Gwendolyn admitted to being a little nervous at the start, but things got easier the more she did it.

"I think I'm going to do it forever," she said. "It's in my heart."

Gilmer said the rehearsal regime Gwendolyn has had to follow is demanding, including Friday nights and Sundays, as well as Saturdays as performance nears. The Friday rehearsals at 6:15 p.m., meaning having to get into the city during rush hour.

But that's no problem for Gwendolyn.

"There's no complaining," he father declared. "It's just her thing."

