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## St. Charles native makes Noble Fool debut

By JOHN PUTERBAUGH - [jputerbaugh@kcchronicle.com](mailto:jputerbaugh@kcchronicle.com)  
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Ian Paul Custer has never competed in a spelling bee, but that hasn't stopped him from acting in one.

Custer, a 24-year-old St. Charles native, plays William Barfee in Noble Fool Theatricals' production of "The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee." The show debuted April 22 and runs through June 13 at the Pheasant Run Resort theater in St. Charles.



**Pictured in a scene from "The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee" are (clockwise from left) Chie Isobe, Jack Sweeney, Erik Kaiko, Ian Paul Custer of St. Charles, Samantha Dubina and Cara Rifki. (Provided photo)**

The Tony Award-winning musical comedy has been a fun show for Custer and his castmates to work on.

"I love the show," Custer said. "It's so hilarious. You can tell there was a lot of improv going on in the original production that they just scripted and put down on paper. It's a riot; it's great."

Custer, who first got involved with theater as a student at Thompson Middle School, went on to earn a Bachelor of Fine Arts in acting from DePaul University in Chicago. While this is his first production with Noble Fool Theatricals, he also has performed in productions through Elgin Community College's community theater and Steel Beam Theatre when he was a student at St. Charles North High School.

Earning his acting chops on stage in Chicago has presented Custer quite a contrast when he takes the stage in front of a hometown crowd in St. Charles. Learning and working in Chicago also showed him a little bit about where St. Charles stands in the theater scene.

"St. Charles is such a great theater town; it really is," Custer said. "I can't tell you how many people I've met in Chicago that were connected to the St. Charles-Elgin area."

Performing in front of and interacting with his hometown crowd has been a "heartwarming" experience for Custer, who couldn't be happier with the show, which presented him the opportunity.

"It's such a fun group of people," Custer said of those involved with the production. "We're all very trusting and we can play off each other and there's a lot of improv elements in the show. And when there's improv in the show, you need to have fun with who you're working with; you need to trust them."

While he doesn't believe any other castmembers have ever participated in an actual spelling bee either, they did do their homework for the task of acting in one. To get a feel for actual spelling bees, the cast actually watched old national spelling bee competitions from ESPN's alternative sports coverage.

"These kids are so heartwarming, because it means the world to them," Custer said of the subjects they studied. "And how could it not mean the world them? I mean, they're only 12."

The show has received a strong and encouraging response so far, he said. With audiences really getting into it, he said it's fun to see when people get upset or excited over certain contestants in the show's spelling bee going out or

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advancing to the next round.

"The audience buys it; they're really along for the ride," Custer said.

### If you go

*What: "The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee" by Noble Fool Theatricals*

*When: Through June 13; 8 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays, 2 p.m. Sundays, 2 p.m. Thursdays (except May 27), and 4:30 p.m. Saturday*

*Where: Noble Fool Theatricals at Pheasant Run Resort in St. Charles, 4051 E. Main St., St. Charles*

*Tickets/Information: Tickets range from \$29-\$39; visit [www.noblefool.org](http://www.noblefool.org) to purchase or for more information*



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