

United in song

New choral group open to region's students

BY ERICA ERWIN



From left, second-graders Demond Thompkins and Tyquan Craig try to match a musical pitch set by Jason Bishop, Young People's Chorus of Erie founder and artistic director, during a visit to Pfeiffer-Burleigh Elementary School on Sept. 26.

Tyquan Craig took a breath, puffed out his chest, and let it rip.

"Ooh, ooh, ooh, ooh, ooh," his voice rising and falling with the notes coming from the piano.

After repeating the exercise a few more times, the second-grader at Erie's Pfeiffer-Burleigh Elementary School was left with one question: Did he make it?

Tyquan was one of at least 130 Pfeiffer-Burleigh students who auditioned Friday for the Young People's Chorus of Erie, a chorus for students age 7 to 18 that aims to bring together students of different geographic, racial and economic backgrounds.

Jason Bishop, founder and director of the chorus, has been touring schools throughout the region auditioning students since the start

of the school year. By the first scheduled rehearsal in January, he hopes to have at least 100 students chosen.

The Young People's Chorus of Erie is the only comprehensive youth choir program in northwest Pennsylvania outside of schools or churches, Bishop said.

Through the chorus, students have the opportunity not only to sing with students from different backgrounds, but to work, play and relate to them as well, Bishop said.

"Programs in churches and schools are very good, but the one thing they don't have is the opportunity for students to come together with students from all walks of life," he said. "Churches and schools tend to be very neighborhood-oriented. What are the chances that a student from the lower east side is going to cross paths with a student from Glenwood?"

The chorus is an affiliate of the Young People's Chorus of New York City. The group already has been invited to play with the New York chorus in a spring chorus festival in the city.

In order to help pay for that trip, and for operational costs for the chorus and its staff, students who are accepted into the group will be charged a \$50 tuition for every month for 10 months.

But Bishop stressed that scholarship opportunities are available, and said no student will be turned away for inability to pay.

On Friday, Tyquan was just happy for the chance to sing, even if he was a little nervous during the audition. He thinks he did OK.

"I thought a lot of people would be looking at me," he said and smiled. "But it wasn't so bad."

ERICA ERWIN can be reached at 870-1846 or by e-mail.