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**T**he applause from the audience rings as the seven-minute-long tap number comes to an end at Liberty High School. The stage lights shine across her face as they reflect a smile of accomplishment. The taste of tea sticks to her tongue from the gin bottle as she squeezes her costar's hand in recognition of their presence.

Senior Ellen Sheeley worked her way up and overcame self-doubts as she pursued her lead role in the production of "Anything Goes" in November 2024.

"I just wanted to hear the applause because it's really cool," Sheeley said. "It's 50 some high school kids all tapping at once, which is really awesome, so I would always listen to the tapping sounds, then I would listen to the reaction from the audience afterwards."

When the musical was announced last school year, Sheeley knew she was going to audition. She started preparing at the end of July 2024. She learned the music specific to her role in the musical and used the skills from her 12 years of dancing.

"The girl who reprised the role, her name is Sutton Foster,



and I've always said anything involving Sutton Foster had always been my dream role," Sheeley said.

Sheeley was in "Prom" and "Something Rotten" at the Musical Theatre Kansas City (MTKC), a preparatory theatre program located in Shawnee, Kansas, along with some of the classics such as "Bad Viper."

"I spend most of my summers down there, so I started to get into it only two years ago, but I've been doing shows since sixth grade," Sheeley said.

Sheeley has been in 17 musicals at MTKC along with 10 middle school and high school shows. Both of Sheeley's siblings entered theatre before she did; her older brother, Patrick, became involved in theatre when he was a freshman and her sister joined several years later.

"I loved watching my brother, and then my sister joined when she was eight, so both of my siblings were doing it," Sheeley said. "I was watching a bunch of shows, but I've always been like, no, I'm just a dancer, but then I finally started auditioning."

According to Backstage, a study conducted in March and April revealed more than 80 percent of professional actors have suffered from stage fright at least once in the span of their career.

"The biggest obstacle is confidence," Sheeley said. "I thought I was just a dancer but



Senior Ellen Sheeley played the lead role of Reno Sweeny in her performance of Anything Goes. "I've always said anything involving Sutton Foster has always been my dream role. When it got announced that it's a Sutton Foster role I pretty much started preparing immediately," Sheeley said. Photo courtesy of Ellen Sheeley.



then, having the ability to be, no, I can do what my siblings do. I can do what my family does. I can do what these kids do."

According to ScholarWorks@BGSU, a survey found 13.21% of dancers feel anxious, 13.21% feel stressed, 30.19% feel embarrassed, 26.42% feel angry, 5.66% feel sad, and only 3.77% feel motivated.

"You're always comparing yourself to others; you have to look like the girl next to you, but I need to have confidence in myself, in my body, in my presence and my looks," Sheeley said. "That is definitely one I had to get used to and figure out for myself because otherwise I wouldn't have gotten what I got."

According to Dancer Nutrition, comparison in dance studios is a common obstacle facing many dancers. They will often compare their bodies, skills, progress, and achievements to their fellow dancers.

"I made it a priority for myself to find a moment to look out into the audience and take it all in because that's what our theater teacher, Mr. Turpin always says, is to soak it all up," Sheeley said. "He wants us to embellish in what we are doing."

Check out the Blue Jay's theatre Instagram page to keep in touch with any upcoming shows and performances. @bluejaytheatre