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### **Albany Fund for Education supports student opportunities**

Amir Taylor already was a veteran of the stage. Malik Sylvester, on the other hand, was an acting novice.

Experience aside, the two Arbor Hill Elementary School fourth-graders held starring roles in their school play this spring, a kid-friendly adaptation of the Disney musical “Aladdin.” The production was one of a dozen district-wide projects made possible this school year with help from the Albany Fund for Education.



**Arbor Hill Elementary’s leading men (L-R): Amir Taylor, Malik Sylvester, Emonie Taylor and Clayton Williams.**

Amir, who played the Prince in “Cinderella,” was nonchalant about his role as Aladdin.

“I wanted to get the main part again and I did,” he said during a rehearsal. The lure of playing leading man aside, his main motivation for joining the cast was to have fun. He also learned a few things in the process.

“Working as a team makes a perfect performance,” he said. “And even if you mess up, you tried to act the part and that’s OK.”

“Aladdin Junior” had its Arbor Hill debut May 21. It came about via collaboration between Arbor Hill Elementary and Park Playhouse Kidz.

The brainchild of former Arbor Hill teacher Shirley Arensberg, Park Playhouse Kidz produced 12 plays in the district over the past three years. The program pairs veteran Park Playhouse actors – often district alums – with schools. Together they see a production from start to finish.

Amanda Serrano, a longtime Park Playhouse actor and graduate of Albany High School, co-directed this spring’s Arbor Hill production with fourth-grade teacher Jefferson Weidman. And Mrs. Arensberg, back home at Arbor Hill, produced the play.

Fifth-grader Janay Scott played Jasmine, the leading lady who eventually marries Aladdin. She and Amir initially balked at the idea of holding hands during their wedding scene. Director Serrano, clearly used to actors’ temperaments, was able to convince the couple to join hands.

The ceremony proceeded smoothly under the bemused eye of Genie, a.k.a. Malik.

The role of Genie was Malik's first foray into the limelight. And if a smile could be measured in watts, Malik's easily lit up the whole school.

"This is my time to shine," he said.

The Albany Fund for Education (AFE) supports people and programs in the City School District of Albany with community-partnership grants like the one that helped finance the play at Arbor Hill Elementary School. Visit [www.thealbanyfundforeducation.org](http://www.thealbanyfundforeducation.org) to learn more.