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Fifth-grader in demand to sing national anthem at events

Las Vegan also takes acting lessons and enjoys playing tennis

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Ellie Smith performs the national anthem at events on an almost weekly basis.

Ten-year-old Ellie Smith first sang "The Star-Spangled Banner" publicly at a Special Olympics event in Las Vegas when she was 6. Now referred to as "The Star-Spangled Girl," Ellie performs the national anthem in front of crowds almost weekly.

The fifth-grader at St. Viator Catholic School has performed the national anthem at events for the Los Angeles Dodgers, Arizona Diamondbacks, Sacramento Kings, Las Vegas 51s, Las Vegas Gladiators, Las Vegas Wranglers and various sports teams at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

In addition, she has performed a medley of patriotic songs at local galas and fundraisers in Southern Nevada.

Many people who have attempted to sing "The Star-Spangled Banner" have trouble hitting the song's high notes. For Ellie, it was no different. "There are two high notes that are E-sharp," says Ellie. "I hit it very well now, but at first it was kind of challenging."

However, performing the anthem in front of a crowd came more naturally for Ellie, who says she "wasn't that nervous" the first time she did it.

"Now, I'm just used to it, and it's always so much fun for me," she says.

One of Ellie's favorite performances of the anthem was at the Santa Anita racetrack in California this past fall.

"It was a great experience," says Ellie. "I got to see the horses, and the crowd cheered. It was a lot of fun."

Ellie's mother, Geri Smith, first heard her daughter singing when the child was 3 months old.

"Ellie was born with the music thing," Geri says. "She started singing Christmas carols in her swing."

When Ellie was 10 months old, Geri enrolled her in Kindermusik, a preschool music program. Ellie was in the program until she was 3.

Both Geri, and Ellie's father, Rick Smith, are happy to assist their daughter in her joy of singing. Ellie began getting bookings after her family submitted tapes of her singing to various organizations. Now many of Ellie's bookings come from members of the audience who hear her sing and ask her to perform at their fundraisers, corporate and community events.

Geri says there is no pressure for Ellie to have a music career, and she can take her love of singing "as far as she wants to."

In addition to taking vocal lessons several times a week from three instuctors, Ellie takes acting lessons at Las Vegas Little Theater, plays tennis and likes basketball. She has an 8-year-old sister, Amy.

Ellie already has been booked for events this month, including St. Rose Dominican Hospital's 50th anniversary Mardi Gras, and she will be performing at a Dallas Mavericks basketball game in March.

Ellie can be heard singing on her Web site, www.hearelliesing.com.

If you know of a worthy candidate for this column, mail information to Youth Spotlight, Las Vegas Review-Journal, P.O. Box 70, Las Vegas, NV 89125-0070, or send faxes to 383-4676.