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[Aspiring singer hopes to be another 'Idol'](#)

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LILBURN — If Nicole Buttram has her way, Lilburn Idol will only be the beginning.

The aspiring 24-year-old singer from Duluth, who is competing in the final night of the city's annual singing competition, plans to try out for "Nashville Star," a country music version of "American Idol," in the fall.

And with that under her belt, Buttram hopes to put her voice to work on her personal passion — supporting America's troops. Although she passes her days doing paperwork in her mother's physical therapy office, she plans one day to travel on a USO tour to sing for soldiers overseas.

"If I could, I would give everything to them," Buttram said.

It's a long road to reach that goal — she estimates that only one female country singer is signed by a record label for every 10 male singers — but Buttram is working away at it.

She practices every day and performs at private parties, weddings and graduation ceremonies.

Buttram is working on a demo CD with five original songs. She rarely goes anywhere without a notebook or digital recorder, just in case a song idea suddenly pops into her head.

She has been working on her voice for years, graduating with a music degree from Emory University in Atlanta in 2004. In the last few years her interest shifted from classical to country music, finding it to be a better genre to pursue her goal of supporting the troops.

Buttram hopes that her classical training will help her stand out in a crowded country music field, where singers are forced to find something unique about themselves to get noticed.

Buttram's mother, Pam, and co-worker, Betsy Reynolds of Lilburn, said it is easy to see she's passionate about singing. She protects her voice by drinking tea and water, avoiding soda.

Before going on stage at Lilburn Idol, she sipped ionized water to help hydrate herself. She even gives up ice cream.

"And that's not easy for Nicole," Pam Buttram said.

Lucky for Nicole Buttram, she has plenty of support for her family. Both her parents sing — they sang at their own wedding — and introduced their daughter to singing years ago at church.

“But she’s the best,” her mother said proudly.

At her first appearance in Lilburn Idol last Thursday, Buttram sings “I Will ... But,” a country song by SheDaisy. The generally quiet singer smiled as she belted out the lyrics, her fist planted on her hip.

Much of Buttram’s interest in country music stems from her passion for the U.S. armed forces. Her family has a military background — her grandfather was an Army Ranger and her father was stationed in Germany during the Vietnam War — but Buttram discovered her passion independently of her family. She communicates with and supports several different soldiers through anysoldier.com, a Web site that matches up soldiers with random people back home.

Buttram has promised herself to stick to a five-year deadline — if she hasn’t made it by then, she’ll reconsider her career choice and explore a career in teaching music.

“But I have to see if I can take this anywhere first before I can be totally satisfied going with something else,” she said.

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