
SVSD Music in the SnoValley Star

2008-2011

Guitar classes bring music to Snoqualmie Elementary students

October 13, 2011

By Sebastian Moraga



Students at Snoqualmie Elementary School master the guitar after school. By Sebastian Moraga

It's a groovy feeling Monday afternoons at Snoqualmie Elementary School.

Just ask the students exiting Portable 28 to show you their fingers — you'll see grooves right across the middle of their fingertips.

Such is the price to pay for guitar stardom. Students are learning how to master the guitar, one painful squeeze of a chord at a time.

And if you think the whole "guitar stardom" thing is a cliché, ask Nate Byford. He is learning the guitar for one reason.

"I want to be in a band," the fifth-grader said.

He later asked the instructor, Bill Bliven, for a name of a good brand of electric guitar.

Lorie Byford, his mother, took the news in stride.

"His main goal right now is jazz band next year, in middle school," she said with a laugh. "That's a little bit better."

Songs in the lessons vary from artists like Alvin and the Chipmunks and Kesha to the song "Frère Jacques." Students inch closer to the day when they can switch chords without grimacing. And they just can't wait.

It's only their second lesson out of 10, and yet when the name Michael Jackson shows up on the screen, a student suggests the class try playing "Thriller."

Bliven, a former music teacher at Opstad Elementary School, teaches the after-school class year round at four elementary schools in the Valley.

With the patience of the manager at a daycare center, Bliven keeps his group focused, with the aid of a software called Gitarrero, and a generous hand when doling out compliments.

Students munch on cheese crackers, M&Ms and other goodies, but never stray too far from the lesson. And with good reason. While Byford wants to be in a band, Willem Kohn wants to emulate a cool, guitar-playing cousin. Paige Lee wants to write her own songs someday. That is, if her hungry guitar lets her.

"My guitar ate my pick," Lee told Bliven, who is also her grandfather.

Bliven flipped and shook the guitar, the pick plummeted to the floor and the lesson continued, with Alvin and his pals squeaking out "Funkytown," as the students practiced the chords.

"It's just rewarding to watch students have fun, and hearing things like a student saying he plays with his dad," Bliven said. "Knowing that they are going to add music to their lives and their families, that's very rewarding."

Mount Si student joins school board

July 20, 2011

By Sebastian Moraga

She acts, and this is a pretty big role. She sings, and she pledges to bring a new voice.

She swims, and she's jumping in a pool with some pretty big fish.

Taylor Pearlstein will represent the students of the Snoqualmie Valley School District starting in September, as the school board's newest student rep.

Pearlstein is an incoming junior at Mount Si High School, a lifeguard at the Si View pool, and an actor and singer in plays and musicals at her school.

"I always try to be as involved as I can," she said. "Leadership has been something that has always interested me."

Once on board, Pearlstein said she wants to bring a new outlook on school issues.

"I want to bring a perspective that has not been brought before," she said, "a voice that has not been heard."

The school board and the community, she said, sometimes do not have a full understanding of what the schools or the students try to do.

For example, she said, the Day of Silence requires long hours of preparation and students try hard to be respectful.

"It's important that the board knows about what we do and that we do a lot to help those causes, so they are not in the dark," she said.

Besides the Day of Silence, Pearlstein has participated in three plays, one musical, the school's gay-straight alliance, Natural Helpers and the school's chapter of Amnesty International.

"Those are a lot of the groups that a lot of times aren't considered," she said. "I thought it would be nice to offer that perspective."

Pearlstein's fellow student rep will be incoming senior Chace Carlson, who will serve for the second consecutive year.

"We're excited to work together," Pearlstein said. "I've worked with him before and we will make a really good team."

Snoqualmie Valley Schools Superintendent Joel Aune said the board will be lucky to have Pearlstein.

"She is impressive," he said.

Aune said Pearlstein wowed the group by showing up in a business suit, on time and early in the morning, although school had been out for days already.

He joked, comparing that to what other students were doing the same day at that hour.

Pearlstein said she felt the interviews for the post were fun but intimidating, given who was asking the questions.

"Those were the superintendent and the school board members," she said.

Now that the spot belongs to her, Pearlstein said she wants her work for the next two years to benefit all students.

She said the decision to apply for the post was hers alone. Jonathan Pearlstein, board member of the Snoqualmie Valley School Foundation and Taylor's dad, said her family advised her to consider whether she was overextending herself.

"But we're very dedicated to the school district," said Jonathan, whose wife is a secretary at Snoqualmie Elementary School, "so if she were to seek this opportunity and receive it, we would be very proud of her, and as it turned out, we are very proud of her."

Taylor, Jonathan said, "has taken her new role to heart. She understands that the responsibility for public education lies in the community and she chooses to take part in that."

'Underdog' Twin Falls earns top honors at Bellevue Jazz Festival

May 25, 2011

By Sebastian Moraga



Trombonists from the Twin Falls Middle School Jazz Band's perform during the Bellevue Jazz Festival. Contributed
If you ask Phoenix Moomaw, it was a scream. If you ask Jacob Wachtendonk, it was almost one.

Moomaw, Wachtendonk and the rest of the Twin Falls Middle School Jazz Band took first place at the Bellevue Jazz Festival on May 13, shocking older, more established bands, like those from Everett's Eisenhower and Seattle's Eckstein middle schools.

"It felt really great," Wachtendonk said.

Moomaw called winning the competition, "exhilarating."

Almost to the end, screaming was in order. Wachtendonk said that before the Twin Falls band played a note, they had a cheering and screaming section at Bellevue High School.

Then, at the end, when the second-place finisher was announced, it was time for another scream. Almost.

"The moment it struck me was when I heard Eckstein had gotten second, which means we got first," Wachtendonk said. "I wanted to yell, but it would have been really unprofessional."

Still, the win was a coup for Twin Falls, Moomaw said.

"Eckstein has won for four to five years, so for a 3-year-old school like Twin Falls to win and upset that balance, it was really not expected of us," he said.

Wachtendonk agreed, saying the school from North Bend walked into Bellevue High as an underdog.

Next year, the band will stroll in as defending champions, but the mentality must remain the same.

"We have to act as if we're the underdogs again," he said.

The band practiced every day of the school year, he added and that made a big difference.

"It put us over the top with our sound and our tightness," he said.

The acoustics at Bellevue High School weren't the smoothest, with every note taking a big bouncy echo. The crowd, other than the screaming section from the Valley, was decidedly short on cheers.

"You're playing and the judges are 10 feet in front of you, watching your every move," Wachtendonk said. "Then, you look into the stands and there are all the other bands, hoping you mess up."

The band played three songs in the preliminary round: "St. James' Infirmary," "Blue and Sentimental" and "Now Is The Time." In the final round, the band performed "Running of the Bulls."

The toughest song was "Blue and Sentimental," Wachtendonk said. Since it's a ballad, it's easy to fall prey to nerves and play it slower or faster than it is supposed to be.

The band kept calm, Moomaw said, thanks to months of preparation.

"Mr. Wenman always pushes us to do our best," he said of Band Director Matt Wenman. "And we really nailed it. It was a group effort."

Mount Si jazz band takes top honor at Bellevue High School Jazz Festival

May 18, 2011

By Staff

Mount Si High School's jazz bands gave 18-karat performances this past weekend at the Bellevue High School Jazz Festival.

That's old school jazz slang for "all out" or "full on." And that is how the school's two jazz bands played.

Their efforts were richly rewarded.

The school's Jazz I band took the festival's top prize, the Sweepstakes Award, given to the band with the best overall performance.

It also won first place in the AAA division, and its Jazz II band won second place in the A/AA division.

It was the first time Mount Si won the Sweepstakes Award. The band beat out more than 20 bands at the May 14 festival. Newport High School's Jazz I Band won the 2010 award.

Along with the school's Symphonic Band and Wind Ensemble, the bands have won a host of awards in the past couple of years.

The Twin Falls Middle School Jazz Band earned top honors among middle school bands at the festival.

Twenty bands from middle schools and junior high schools competed May 13.

This year marked the festival's 29th year

Mount Si High School jazz band takes top honor at Bellevue High School Jazz Festival

May 17, 2011

By Administrator

[Mount Si High School's jazz bands](#) gave 18-karat performances this weekend at the [Bellevue High School Jazz Festival](#). That's old school jazz slang for 'all out' or 'full on.' And that is how the school's two jazz bands played. Their efforts were richly rewarded.

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The [Twin Falls Middle School Jazz Band](#) earned top honors for middle school bands at the festival.

Teachers plan two-year leave

May 11, 2011

By Laura Geggel

They've directed plays, taught choirs and marching bands, led student trips to Washington, D.C., and roller-skated for a week during class.

Kim and Dean Snavelly, music teachers at Mount Si High School and Snoqualmie Middle School, respectively, plan to take a two-year hiatus from teaching while they earn their master's degrees at Central Washington University.

The couple plans to move with their two children to Ellensburg, the city where they both earned their undergraduate degrees and met before tying the knot.



Kim and Dean Snavelly, music teachers at Mount Si High School and Snoqualmie Middle School, respectively, are taking a two-year leave in order to earn their master's degrees. Contributed Dean began teaching in the Snoqualmie Valley School District in 1998, and Kim started two years later, in 2000.

Dean teaches choir and band at Snoqualmie Middle School, where he has joked with, taught and pushed students academically for years.

"Dean is an influential force and valued teacher, but more importantly, a remarkable person," Principal Vernie Newell said. "It goes without saying, Dean is highly respected by students, staff and the community. His impact on student lives and the strong, infectious and energetic music program and culture he has created for both SMS and the community best characterizes Dean Snavelly."

Dean is known for myriad activities, such as playing the tuba for the Seattle Sounders FC band, called Sound Wave, beginning an adult community band in Snoqualmie Valley in 2008 and taking his choir students on an annual trip to Leavenworth.

"Understandably, filling Dean's shoes is quite an undertaking, but I'm confident that we will continue to provide our students with an energetic and rich music program," Newell said.

Kim has an equally musical following at Mount Si as the choir and drama teacher. When she started in the district, there was one choir at the high school and one before-school choir at Snoqualmie Middle School.

Under her leadership, choir became a daytime class at Snoqualmie Middle School, and it also entered the school day at Chief Kanim and Twin Falls middle schools.

Now, the school district has nine choirs, with four of them at Mount Si.

"I'm very proud of the work we put into it," she said, not to mention, "the theater program is going gangbusters."

Last summer, the couple attended the Broadway Teachers Workshop in New York City, learning theater and acting skills they could transfer to their students at Mount Si.

By earning her master's degree at Central, Kim will be able to keep her teaching certificate current and competitive. She said she is looking forward to working with Central's Director of Choral Studies Dr. Gary Weidenaar.

Both Kim and Dean will work as teaching assistants and receive a stipend while at Central.

"At Central's music department, the graduates are a pretty integral part of what we deliver," Weidenaar said. "We're looking for people who have experience, who are learning while they are here, but are also sharing their experiences."

The drama and choral Mount Si Wildcats are already planning trips to visit their teachers.

"It's crazy," Kim said. "I'm very excited. It's going to be a really amazing opportunity to work with professors of this caliber and get to make music — I get to make music, not just be on the other side of the podium."

She called herself "heartsick" about leaving the Valley, but said she hopes to return in fall 2013. Teachers are allowed to take up to a one-year leave of absence. The Snavelly duo can only request one year at a time, so they plan to request one now and the second one next year.

"We're going to come back better teachers and be able to serve kids better than we are right now," Kim said. "The path will be worth it, but it's hard to say goodbye."

Mount Si drama teachers meet Broadway greats in New York

September 2, 2010

By Laura Geggel

NEW — 6:00 a.m. Sept. 2, 2010

Snoqualmie Valley student drama shows may sparkle with ideas from Broadway, now that drama teachers Dean and Kim Snavely have completed the Broadway Teachers Workshop.

In New York, the Snavelys rubbed elbows with Broadway stars and participated in dozens of workshops, including ones detailing stage makeup, sound, lighting and higher education.

"It exceeded both of our expectations inexplicably," said Dean Snavely, Snoqualmie Middle School music director and Mount Si High School musical theater director.

The Snavelys learned about the workshop through their licensing company, Music Theatre International. Every time a play is performed, a school must receive permission from a licensing company. The company told the Snavelys about the New York workshop, but they balked at the price.

They spoke with students, other teachers and administrators, and heard encouragement from every angle.

"Everybody said this is a really amazing opportunity for you guys to get training and to learn what is happening in the world of high school theater," Dean Snavely said.

The couple used about \$4,000 of Associated Student Body money to go to New York, and scrimped wherever they could.

"There was no extravagance," Dean Snavely said. "We sucked the marrow out of New York City."

They both said they would share their newfound knowledge with other drama teachers in the Snoqualmie Valley district. Dean Snavely said he would also work to bridge the gap between middle and high school drama productions.

The Broadway Teachers Workshop held two full days of workshops, with participants seeing Broadway plays at night. On the third day, they saw back-to-back plays, a theater teacher's delight.

In the end, the Snavelys saw "Memphis," "Million Dollar Quartet," "American Idiot" and "Promises Promises," with star Sean Hayes, who played Jack on the TV show "Will and Grace." At the end of the show, Hayes spoke with the 50 teachers in the Broadway Teachers Workshop

"We got to talk to him as teachers," Dean Snavely said, "and he got to talk to us about what in school made him want to stay with acting. That was amazingly helpful."

The Snavelys learned that Hayes appreciated his drama teachers and engaging yet challenging productions.

When they weren't at shows, the Snavelys attended workshops. Mount Si music and drama director Kim Snavely said she wanted to help students pursue theater in higher education, so she went to a workshop with directors from seven theater schools. The directors reviewed what they look for in prospective students, giving Kim Snavely ideas for helping students apply to college.

The couple both attended a makeup workshop, learning from the artist who worked on shows like "Young Frankenstein."

"I can't wait to get back to my theater class, because we do a makeup unit and I can really coach kids to be more effective," Kim Snavely said. "It's all about playing with shadow and light and playing with effects, especially with wrinkles."

Dean Snavely said his favorite workshop was "Die Vampire Die," taught by the creator of the musical "Title of Show."

During the workshop, Dean Snavely had to find and kill his vampire — basically the clog that blocks creative people's bursts of inspiration.

"Your vampire is the thing that gets in the way," Dean Snavely said. "It could be your seventh-grade choir teacher telling you you couldn't sing, and that's your vampire." He destroyed his vampire, but because of a pact he made with the other teachers in the workshop, he said he couldn't reveal what it was.

"What I found when I walked out of there was I killed my vampire," Dean Snavely said. "I have enormous creative material not only for drama, but also for choir and band. I couldn't wait for school to start. I love my summer, but I can't wait to try some ideas. We're going to talk a lot about vampires."

Snoqualmie Valley students to represent peers on school board

July 29, 2010

By Laura Geggel

NEW — 8:00 p.m. July 29, 2010



Chace Carlson

For the second consecutive year, the Snoqualmie Valley School Board will have two student representatives serving on its board.

The students, Mount Si High School senior Cassidy Weldon and junior Chace Carlson, will serve for the 2010-11 school year after being sworn in at the Aug. 26 school board meeting, attending its bimonthly meetings and serving as liaisons between the school board and the Mount Si Associated Student Body.

School board President Caroline Loudenback said the students' input was invaluable.

"As we make decisions that impact the student, it is important to have the student perspective, because they are in the schools day to day and the student representatives offer this insight and food for thought," Loudenback said.

Weldon, a 2010 student representative, is the ASB head chair of community relations, a Mount Si cheerleader and sings and plays the keyboard at LifePointe Community Church in Snoqualmie.

After serving as a student representative for six months, Weldon said she had a better grasp about how the school district functions. This year, she said she would talk to more of her peers about the school board meetings and get a lot of different perspectives from different students at the school.

"There are some things that need to be talked about," she said.

Carlson is part of the National Honors Society and ASB, plays football and soccer at Mount Si and also plays soccer on a club team.

He said he is excited to share his opinions about life in the district with the school board.

"I just think it's a good way to get involved, especially with all of the issues we've been involved in recently," he said, naming school crowding, budget limitations and issues affecting Mount Si, like the November incident in which a freshman was assaulted by another student and ended up in the hospital.

"I don't get to vote on those, but I get to show my opinion," Carlson said.

To qualify as student representatives, students must be juniors or seniors, maintain good grades, and participate and have good standing in activities or sports.

Those interested submitted a student representative application as well as two reference letters before going through an interview process.

The application is also open to students at Two Rivers School.

Though they do not have voting power, student representatives carry out the important role of keeping the school board up to date with student-related issues and opinions

Snoqualmie music teacher takes up weeklong skating challenge

April 22, 2010

By Laura Geggel



Snoqualmie Middle School music teacher Dean Snavelly taught the fundamentals of music on eight wheels before a class of sixth graders. Snavelly said if students raised enough money for music boosters, he would wear roller skates for one week. (Photo by Laura Geggel)

NEW — 6:00 a.m. April 22, 2010

If you think teaching on two feet is hard, try teaching on eight wheels. Snoqualmie Middle School music teacher Dean Snavelly lost a challenge, and had to skate on old-school roller skates for an entire school week.

That's five days on wheels. One more day and he might have had to join Seattle's Rat City Rollergirls.

"Every year I do something stupid to raise money," Snavelly said.

Once, he shaved his head and let his students sign it with permanent markers. Another time, he camped outside of SMS for one week in a tent. But this year, he wanted to do something different.

After all, the fundraiser's cause was near and dear to his heart.

Every year, eighth-grade music students go on a weekend field trip to Oregon State University to compete in band and choir competitions, attend workshops and meet music students from across the Pacific Northwest. This year, the field trip is April 22-24.

Not every student can afford to go on the fieldtrip, Snavelly said.

To help raise money, Snoqualmie Middle School Music Boosters held a dance March 26, and invited middle school students from Twin Falls and Chief Kanim middle schools to join them.

It was then that Snavelly hatched his plan.

He asked his students to invite at least 500 of their middle-school friends to the dance. If they met his challenge, he said he would do something silly.

One student suggested he wear roller skates for one week, and Snavelly agreed, sealing the deal.

His students were so excited, they easily met his challenge, bringing 517 partygoers and profiting \$2,200.

It didn't hurt that a DJ from KISS 106.1 FM was spinning tunes. Snavelly said the DJ "was awesome," and "super concerned the music he played was appropriate for middle schoolers."

Sixth-grader Emily Latta said getting a crowd to come was easy.

"It wasn't hard," Latta said. "We just had to tell our friends who was the DJ."

Once Snavelly realized his students had bested him, he strapped on a pair of inline skates and sailed into the gym.

"He's really cool on skates," Snoqualmie Middle School sixth-grader Sadie Woolf said.

Her friends agreed.

"He was spinning around on the dance floor," sixth-grader Hannah Griffin said.

Inline skates hurt his feet, so Snavelly switched to a pair of roller skates borrowed from Skate King.

"I'm not as clumsy as I thought I would be," Snavelly said, though he did fall once in the copy room. Both of his hands were full of photocopies and he realized he didn't have a free hand to stabilize himself.

Next thing he knew, he was on the ground, along with 300 scattered pages.

Sixth-grader Sophie Caputo said classes with Snavelly were pretty much the same, even when her teacher was on eight wheels.

"It hasn't changed, it's just gotten crazier," Caputo said

Snoqualmie Valley Schools Foundation aims to raise \$100,000

March 31, 2010

By Laura Geggel

NEW — 12:12 p.m. March 31, 2010

Twin Falls Middle School music teacher Matt Wenman asked an audience of 300 to listen to what his jazz students would sound like without sheet music.

The students took on the challenge, but only got a few bars into the song before they sputtered out, memories blank.

"All of the music we've played this year and last year, except for a few tunes I borrowed from some of the other schools, has been provided by the (Snoqualmie Valley Schools) Foundation," Wenman said. "Teaching music without sheet music is really quite impossible."

Once their stands were turned the right way, the award-winning students played a few jazzy songs, earning thunderous applause from the audience at the annual [Snoqualmie Valley Schools Foundation](#) Spring Fundraising Luncheon March 25.

The foundation pays for a number of education-related materials and resources. For example, when Twin Falls opened in 2008, Wenman had no sheet music. With the foundation's help, his music library has grown.

Foundation President Carolyn Simpson urged the community to donate so it could continue to pay for classroom grants, like sheet music and science supplies; districtwide initiatives, like the elementary school reading intervention program; and professional development for teachers, like the Summer Learning Academy for educators.

Snoqualmie Valley Schools Superintendent Joel Aune thanked the foundation for its educational support and reminded the community of the budget cuts the district could face once the state's budget is finalized. In a worst-case scenario, the district would have to lay off 26 teachers and would lose about \$1.8 million, about 3.6 percent of its total budget.

"While the foundation's resources of support have always been important, they've never been more important than they are today," Aune said.

Foundation members made it no secret the nonprofit needed more money for the schools. At its 2009 luncheon, the foundation raised \$65,000, or about enough money to give every student in the district \$12.

In contrast, last year, the Issaquah Schools Foundation raised \$33 per student, the Lake Washington Schools Foundation raised \$39 per student and the Bellevue Schools Foundation raised \$82 per student.

This year, the local foundation has a goal of raising \$100,000. As of March 29, it had collected pledges of \$76,000.

Part of the money will help pay for a math intervention program, paying for teachers to stay after school and answer students' questions, Simpson said.

As the audience ate lunch at the Snoqualmie Ridge TPC Golf Club, the foundation honored its four educators of the year — Laura Tarp, Jan Miller, Seth Deniston and Christi Wright.

Simpson urged the community to donate and thanked businesses including Washington Crane & Hoist, Hudson Bay Insulation and Microsoft, that had donated generously.

"We're all here today for one reason, because we believe in these kids right here, in this Valley," Simpson said. "We believe in excellence in education for every student in every classroom at every school."

She stressed that 90 percent of all donations pay for educational resources in Valley schools. She also noted that the foundation is looking for free office space.

To donate:

To donate to the Snoqualmie Valley Schools Foundation, visit www.svsfoundation.org or write a check to the foundation and mail it to P.O. Box 724, Fall City, WA 98024.

School district jazz bands soar to success

May 22, 2009

By Laura Geggel

Every morning at 6:35 a.m., 22 Twin Falls Middle School students gather in the band room for zero-period to play jazz. This may be the first year the group of sixth-, seventh- and eighth-graders are jamming with each other, but their musical chemistry and skill has already caught the attention of judges from across the area.

At the May 1-2 Bellevue High School Jazz Festival, The Twin Falls jazz band placed third out of 25 middle school jazz bands.

"It looks like they're doing some really good things, fundamentally," said judge and Eastern Washington University Jazz Program Director Rob Tapper. "I think a lot of times, the high school directors take for granted what fundamental skills and concepts are taught at the younger levels. If they're not done correctly, it leaves a lot of gaps in what the students understand and what they can produce."



Twin Falls Middle School students Alix Parsons plays the bass, Kristin Moore (left), Sebastian Gant, J.T. Hartman and Nick Heaslett play the trombone and Aaron Tevis and Nick Apone play the trumpet.

An early start

Twin Falls eighth-grader Nick Apone remembered when he started playing the trumpet in elementary school. Snoqualmie Valley School District music teachers introduce students to band in the fifth grade. The programs are optional at every school except North Bend Elementary, where the trumpet, trombone, flute and clarinet are integrated into the curriculum.

"What's cool is, by the end of the year, the students, about 75 percent of them, can read music," North Bend Elementary music teacher Dan Thompson said. "There are some that don't learn how to read music, but at least they have the experience."

Thompson allows students to play at their own pace, applauding them when they play anything from simple to complex songs. Some come to his classroom during their lunch breaks and form bands.

"That's where it starts, you want to make it fun for them and you want to make it something that is a priority for them in their life," Thompson said.

The next level

Many of the students from North Bend and Opstad filter into Twin Falls Middle, where they have the opportunity to join jazz band. The teacher, 23-year-old Matt Wenman, leads the group, bobbing his head up and down to the beat as he conducts. The morning of May 13 was no exception as he led them in an improvisation activity. As the percussion and bass kept the beat, the wind instrument musicians stood up one at a time and sounded a solo that they had made up on the spot — or at least the night before.

"We're working on a lot of improvisation," Wenman said. "Improvisation is something that takes years of practice. It was one of our weaker points this year."

To help his students excel in improv, he encourages them to listen to other jazz artists so they can learn to "speak the culture" of jazz. He also encourages them to practice scales and teaches them helpful music theory hints like the "circle of fourths," in which every note has three notes that go with it.

"I just think it's really fun," seventh-grade saxophone player Lizzi Young said. "Everyone goes around and does a solo."

Students in jazz band have to enroll in their respective grade's concert band as well, meaning they play for about two hours every day, before they practice at home.

"We play faster and harder music," eighth-grade upright bass and electric bass player Alix Parsons said, comparing jazz band to her other music class.

Wenman graduated from the University of Washington last year with a degree in music education. He remembered hearing a middle school band play the thrilling "Jurassic Park" score for his fifth-grade class, before he started playing the saxophone in sixth grade.

"I remember it vividly," Wenman said. "I thought, 'you got to be kidding me, I am so joining band.'"

Chief Kanim and Snoqualmie Middle schools have jazz bands, as well.

"The style of jazz itself is the only true American form of music," Snoqualmie Middle School Band Director Dean Snavelly said. "It's our responsibility to teach it."

Snavelly said he and his students felt enormously proud of Twin Falls for placing third at the Bellevue High School Jazz festival. They even made a poster of congratulations for their peers, many of whom were their classmates the year before Twin Falls opened.

By high school, the jazz students will be reunited in one of two of Adam Rupert's jazz bands at Mount Si High School.

"We have an award-winning program at Mount Si, so we have to train them for jazz," Snavelly said.

Hear the music

Twin Falls Middle School's music showcase will be held June 18 from 7-9:30 p.m. The \$3 tickets will benefit the music booster club. All of the bands and choirs will perform separately and then join together to present Beethoven's "Ode to Joy."

Snoqualmie Middle School band and choir concert is at 7 p.m. in the gym June 9. Chief Kanim Middle School's band and choir concert is from 7-9 p.m. June 10

Valley youth orchestra seeks string players

May 13, 2009

By Laura Geggel

Three of Sheila Bateman's children play stringed instruments, but there has rarely been a place they can play in a group beyond themselves. So, after having her two violinists and cellist play in a trio together, Bateman has recently decided to expand the circle.

"I thought 'Wow, since I'm doing this anyway, let's invite other kids to do it with us,'" Bateman said.

A violinist herself, Bateman knows the advantages of group practice. The Snoqualmie resident grew up in Newcastle, where she began studying the violin at age 4 and later played in the Seattle Youth Symphony. At Brigham Young University, Bateman majored in biology and minored in music, while playing for the BYU Philharmonic Orchestra. Now she passes on her talent to students as a music teacher.

Bateman's group, Snoqualmie Strings, is available for violin, viola, cello and bass youth players of all ages. The \$15 pilot program group meets at Snoqualmie Middle School band room from 2:30-3:30 p.m. every Friday. Bateman recommends that students have at least six months of playing experience and a private teacher.

"This is just for getting together to play for fun," Bateman said. "I am not able to help anyone on their technique. That's something for a private instructor to address."

To learn more, call Bateman at 831-7930.

Two of Sarah Ricks' children have enrolled in Snoqualmie Strings.

When the Ricks lived in Illinois, the schools offered free orchestra classes. None of the Snoqualmie Valley schools offer music classes for string instruments, which made her son Spencer's violin playing more of a solitary struggle since the family's move to Snoqualmie four years ago. They tried out the Bellevue Youth Symphony Orchestra for a while, but the cost and traveling time wore on them.

Every month, he would play at a nursing home in North Bend, and even that public performance helped give him a reason to practice.

"The group environment is huge. It makes learning the music worth it," Ricks said. "Practicing can be drudgery, if you don't have a reason."

"Hopefully, the group will help the kids get more experience with their peers," North Bend parent Kerry Crowley said.

Snoqualmie Strings has also spurred Spencer's 5-year-old sister Miriam more toward the violin.

"She has been following her big brother and learning," Ricks said. "She watched the big kids and she said, 'I want to be like them.' If she sees other kids playing, it's a social thing."

Bateman said the group would retain current string players and draw in new ones.

"I've had a couple of students that progressed for a little while on the violin, and they said, 'If I played flute, I could play with the school band where my friends are.' And they quit," Bateman said. "If kids have a place to go and play with their friends, they stick with the music."

Opstad students find their beat

January 24, 2009

By Laura Geggel

Saturday Night Live's Christopher Walken got it right in a comedy sketch in which he played music producer and cowbell-aficionado Bruce Dickinson.

"I got a fever and the only prescription is more cowbell," Walken said in a now oft-quoted line.

Just like Walken told Will Ferrell to play "more cowbell" in the 2000 SNL sketch, Opstad Elementary students recently played cowbells of their own, in addition to the sticks, congas, double bells, shekeres, xylophones, maracas and tambourines.



Opstad Elementary fourth-grade students J.T. Ferguson, left, and Keala Mercer practice playing the drum.

The Opstad Elementary fourth-grade drum ensemble played three pieces after the Martin Luther King Jr. play Jan. 21. About 40 fourth-grade students gave up their lunch recess to practice for the ensemble.

Opstad music teacher Carol Heitt incorporated the instruments into the fourth-grade music lessons, which are held every six days. With limited instruments and practice time, she made the ensemble a voluntary event.

Heitt came to Opstad last year and promptly applied for two grants that changed her entire curriculum. The first grant, given by the Snoqualmie Valley Schools Foundation, provided her with \$3,600 to buy world-drumming instruments and lesson plans. The second grant, provided by the Opstad PTA, gave Heitt \$200 to buy xylophones.

"These are high-quality drums and they're going to last a while," Heitt said. "I really like to do hands-on and cultural lessons as much as possible."

Heitt also thanked the foundation for providing keyboards for the elementary students. Each of the five elementary schools share the keyboards, which rotate in 1.5-month increments from school to school.

Fourth-grader Natalie Weidenbach said she initially felt embarrassed and nervous when handling her conga. Now, after countless practices, Weidenbach said she feels more confident making music.

A large handful of students already had practice playing the drum or reading music.

Alec Struelens, whose father plays in an African band, said he gets valuable practice time with his father.

Other students learned everything in class. Fourth-grade student Conrad Sparling explained how to correctly hold one of his instruments of choice — the rhythm sticks.

"You have to hold them in a plus sign and go tap-tap-tap," Sparling said.

Heitt led the group of merry noisemakers. She helped the students keep time as they practiced for the concert.

"Whatever you do, don't speed up," she advised, as some students got ahead of themselves.

"We've been practicing a lot this week," said fourth-grade drummer Madison Harrison. "I think it's really hard to keep up with the drums. It hurts your palms a lot."

But whether they played the high drum or the cowbell, the students said they had a great time learning how to play as a group.

"My favorite part is to keep the beat," James Bent said.

Local choirs reach high note in Leavenworth

January 2, 2009
By Laura Geggel

Amid the snow and shoppers, choirs from all three of Snoqualmie Valley's middle schools performed in Leavenworth Dec. 12, adding to the musical atmosphere of the Bavarian town.

Although the teenage singers performed in a gazebo in downtown Leavenworth, their voices were heard throughout the shopping district. Microphones in the gazebo picked up their songs and broadcast them live to local venues.



Chief Kanim Middle School choir students sing "This Little Light of Mine" as they hold candles during a winter performance.

"It was neat to sing in the snow with the lights," said Chief Kanim Music Director Haley Franzwa. "It was kind of magical." Her seventh-grade student Sabrina Saechao agreed.

"It was really cold and snowy," Saechao said. "It was really pretty."

This is the first year Chief Kanim has had choir as a class. Last year, the choir met two days a week before school.

Each school was allotted a half-hour performance time. Before singing together at the end for "This Little Light of Mine," Chief Kanim's sixth-, seventh- and eighth-grade choirs each sang different songs, including holiday medleys like *Adeste Fideles*, a Latin version of *Approach Ye Faithful*.

Sixth-grader Kayla Steilen, who sang a solo, said her class had practiced its repertoire since the beginning of the year. Like the other students, Steilen got a thrill from performing in Leavenworth.

"It was a little frightening, but fun at the same time," Steilen said.

Instead of singing separately, Dean Snavelly's Snoqualmie Middle School choirs all sang together. This is the 10th year the Snoqualmie Middle School choir has traveled to Leavenworth, and this year their program had more of an international slant.

"I dug into the bottom of my library and found some quirky stuff no one else would do," Snavelly said.

The choir sang a Christmas lullaby from China, English Christmas carols from across the Atlantic and a Hebrew song called "Bitty Bom."

Twin Fall's eighth-grade choir also sang as its director Matt Wenman conducted. In addition to performing, students had an hour to spare before the show, prompting many to explore Leavenworth and eat lunch. Chief Kanim eighth-grader Andrea Suttle said she enjoyed hopping around town for snacks.

"We had ice cream in the snow," Suttle said. "I got birthday cake remix."

The three music directors hope to keep Leavenworth an annual tradition, not only to give the students experience performing at different venues, but also to help the choirs bond as a group and learn what else they have in common besides their love of music.

Twin Falls razzles and dazzles at dedication

November 6, 2008

By Laura Geggel

Presenters talked about learning, the environment, fundraising and elk at the Twin Falls Middle School Dedication and Community Celebration Oct. 30. ASB students led guests on tours of the school, while middle-school student Gabe Kangas played the piano. The ribbon cutting, performed by School Board President Marci



Busby, officially opened the school for business.

The dedication had a full program, starting with local Boy Scouts Daniel Green, Tyler Moore, Sean Heckler and Collin Peery, who led the Pledge of Alliance for the crowd of about 120.

Principal Ruth Moen acknowledged the property's former owner, Paul Tredway, who sold the lot to the school district. Twin Falls architects also received a round of applause. A few community members inspected Twin Falls new spirit stick, carved by Twin Falls parent and artist Bob Antone. Fury Construction found the cedar log buried 20 feet under the Cascade Golf Course. The construction company donated the wood to Antone, who said he would carve it with symbols representing the new middle school.

Antone said he suspected the log was buried in the late 1800s to help develop transportation in the Valley.

"They would bury cedar logs to build up the roadway and prevent washouts," Antone said.

The spirit stick will be awarded to the class who wins the school's spirit-week competition.

"It's an actual living piece of history, an artifact the kids can hold," Antone said.

Artifacts are everywhere, and so are elk. Moen mentioned math teacher George Warren had an "elk incident," a story he elaborated on later.

As he drove to Twin Falls via Southeast Mount Si Road the morning of Oct. 24, he got an unpleasant surprise.

"All of a sudden, this elk came from across the street and just bolted," Warren said.

He hit the elk, which busted the side and hood of his Honda. Luckily, Warren was uninjured and there were no other cars around.

"It could have been a multiple-car accident," Warren said.

Joel Aune followed Moen on the stage, praising voters for passing the 2003 bond funding the construction of Twin Falls.

"Without community, schools do not get built and more importantly schools do not flourish," Aune said.

ASB student leaders and Green Team advisors also made presentations. Science teacher Dawn Frearson said she hoped Snoqualmie Valley could become a "green district" through the King County Green Schools program.

Following the Green Team update, a group of six girls presented on the School of the Future project. To enter the national contest, the students will have to design a model and write a 750-word essay about their entry.

The girls said they would design their school with environmentally friendly aspects, including geothermal heat sourcing, solar panels and a recycling system. If they place at the regional competition, the three Twin Falls students will win a free trip to Washington D.C. with their advisor Dave Bettine for the national championship.

The dedication ended with a speech from PTSA President Xiomara Pilon, who stated her goal to raise \$70,000 during the 2008-09 school year. To jumpstart its campaign, the PTSA is selling \$100 name-bricks that will pave the pathway leading from the parking lot to the school.

Matt Wenman and the Twin Falls Middle School Jazz Band — complete with piano and xylophone — debuted at the end of the open house, much to the delight of audience members who tapped their feet in time with the snazzy tunes.

With the word "legacy" on the lips of so many presenters, Aune summed it up by saying the school would serve students for years to come.

"I believe that schools are a measure of a community's priorities and values," Aune said. "This school, like our other schoolhouses sends a strong message that our community places high value on education and the highest value on its children."

Valley pushes for a youth symphony

August 28, 2008

By Laura Geggel

When 13-year-old Elizabeth Bauer of Fall City began playing the violin in fourth grade, her family didn't stop to consider the Valley's lack of opportunities for string players.

"When she started, it never crossed our minds that there wasn't an orchestra," said Lois Bauer, her mother.

Students rubbing rosin on their viola or cello bows cannot be found en masse anywhere in Snoqualmie Valley. There is neither an orchestra program in the schools nor a youth symphony in the Valley.

"Snoqualmie Valley needs a string program to complete their music program, which is typically band, choir and orchestra," said General Manager at Hammond Ashley Violins Bryce Van Parys.

Both the middle and high schools have choirs and bands. Dean Snavelly, director of music at Snoqualmie

Middle School, said he will incorporate the occasional string student into his band, but there is no specific program for string players. Only the temporary volunteer pit orchestra, which plays for the musicals at Mount Si High School, includes chairs for violin, viola, cello and bass musicians.

"The Valley has plenty of orchestral players from second grade through senior year," said Mount Si Jazz Band Teacher Adam Rupert. "They don't have an outlet in K-12 public schools in the area."

A group of parents, teachers and community members are working together to provide stringed opportunities for Valley students, both young and old.

This fall, Miranda Thorpe, co-vice president of the Fall City Elementary PTA, plans to submit a grant to the Snoqualmie Valley Schools Foundation for an elementary student strings program.

"I want to be able to provide a place for the younger kids to know what it's like to play in a group," Thorpe said.

Darlene Rose, owner of Rose Music Studios in Fall City and teacher at Snoqualmie Ridge Early Learning Center, would be the conductor for the after-school orchestra.

"A lot of kids will leave the area and drive 30-minutes or more to another youth orchestra," Rose said. "It would be nice to have a community youth orchestra."

The other youth symphony orchestras are all a trek from the Valley in places like Seattle, Bellevue, Everett, Mill Creek, Maple Valley and Tacoma and can cost anywhere from \$300 to \$1,000 a year. Many of these symphony orchestras require their students to play in their schools' orchestras if there is one available.

"We require or strongly encourage that if your school has a program, you need to be in it," said Ruth Brewster, executive director of Bellevue Youth Symphony Orchestra.

"There is no substitute for the rehearsal that you get, in some cases, once a day."

Brewster said private lessons are a boon, but playing in a group also teaches young musicians valuable skills.

"We've had students who have never learned how to watch a conductor. They play at 16 different speeds and there seems to be a race for who can get to the end first,"

Brewster said. "Life is not a solo affair. It's a team."

Playing a stringed instrument – solo or in a group – has its perks. Northwestern University researchers published a 2007 study showing that the brainstems of students who played a musical instrument were more likely to be sensitive to speech sounds.

A 1998 meta-analysis in the journal 'National Association of Secondary School Principals,' showed that students enrolled in instrumental music classes scored better on standardized tests, earned higher grades and were more likely to hold leadership roles.

The list went on: the same study showed that playing an instrument helped improve memory, listening, recall and concentration skills.

Snoqualmie Valley youth should be afforded these opportunities, Rupert said.

Rupert said he hopes to begin the middle and high school orchestra as a bi-weekly, after-school activity.

He said he would like to house the practices at two different schools and have beginner and intermediate sections.

The program could be financed through grants from the Snoqualmie Valley Schools Foundation, PTSA and fundraising, Rupert said. The funds would pay for a conductor and supplies like sheet music.

Thorpe's proposed grade-school orchestra could be a feeder program for the middle and high school orchestra program.

Once students become proficient in their instruments, they could join wind and percussion musicians. When string, percussion and wind instruments play together, the musical repertoire changes, allowing students to play more music from more genres, Van Parys said, adding that a full orchestral experience will give students a real-life dose of how professional symphonies work.

The Valley has already hosted a short-lived orchestral program. From 2001 to 2004, The SnoValley Youth

Hub organized the Snoqualmie Valley Junior Symphony, two groups – one in North Bend and the other in Fall City – with participation involving about 50 elementary and middle school students. The tuition-based program disbanded due to leadership problems.

If the after-school string programs successfully attract string players, Rupert said the Valley could start its own youth symphony in a few years.

Brewster, from her seat at the Bellevue Youth Symphony Orchestra, which serves 16 students from North Bend, Snoqualmie, Preston, Fall City and Duvall, said musical programs may take awhile to establish, but the rewards were palpable.

Students use after-school hours to learn

April 16, 2008

By Laura Geggel



In lieu of the proverbial milk, cookies and cartoons after school, many elementary school students in Snoqualmie Valley are enrolling in an array of afternoon activities, from Mad Science to Art for Kids.

At Opstad and North Bend Elementary, the courses are organized under an umbrella program called RISE – Resource Integration for Scholastic Enrichment. Cascade View and Snoqualmie Elementary also play host to after-school activities.

"It's a fun way for kids to get to know each other who aren't in the same class," said Sherry Isaacs, a writing and pottery after-school instructor at Cascade View Elementary. RISE originated at North Bend Elementary in 1999, said Linda Young, a former PTA member at Opstad Elementary who helped reinstate the program last spring. Her daughter Maile participated in RISE in 2002, before it stopped due to lack of parent volunteers.

Her first challenge involved finding parent volunteers and instructors, Young said.

"I started asking people I knew who had taken dance or golf," said Young. "I always asked if there was an instructor in the valley because I wanted to use local people."

More than 100 children participated in 14 different classes the first season, including Maile, now a sixth grader at Snoqualmie Middle School. Maile took a theater class, which she said she enjoyed as much as French and baton RISE classes she had previously taken.

"I was pretty excited," Maile said.

Xiomara Pilon, vice president of the Opstad Elementary PTA, took over for Young this year as twice as many children signed up for courses like guitar, sign language, jump rope and golf – which has turned the Opstad Elementary field into a mini-Tiger Woods' training course. Keeping in step with student demand, Pilon and colleagues sent out electronic surveys encouraging participants to vote for future workshops, including a jazz and cartoon class.

The after-school programs cost anywhere from \$25 to \$200 depending on their length.

"It's a great price and the instructors are very good," said Pilon. "We've had very good feedback from the parents."

Pilon hopes that RISE will grow next year.

"We want to get a wider variety of classes," Pilon said. "We are looking at meeting with North Bend Elementary so we can compare notes to see what is working well. Our goal is to figure out how, as a district, we can service the elementary schools."

North Bend Elementary has about 125 children participating in RISE programs this year, offering classes in Latino Lingo, Rocket Science – a bottle rocket course – line dancing and clay creations.

One class taught fourth and fifth graders how to make their own after-school snacks.

"The goal is to help them become more independent in the kitchen so they can be more independent for middle school," said Beth Burrows, president of the North Bend Elementary PTA and co-coordinator of the RISE program.

"It gives kids a sample of something different without having to sign up for a long-term course," Burrows added.

One popular course, guitar, is taught by former Opstad Elementary music teacher Bill Bliven. He instructs first through fifth graders at Opstad Elementary and Snoqualmie Elementary and is planning to include Cascade View Elementary next year.

The children can use the provided three-fourths sized guitars as Bliven teaches them chord progressions and tunes.

Eric Howland said his son Reid practices the guitar at least a half-hour a day.

"(Reid) loves it," Howland said. "He has half-hour lessons, but wants to go an hour."

After-school lessons last anywhere from 45 minutes to an hour-and-a-half and continue for five to eight weeks, depending on the school