

MUSIC EDUCATION CHARITY NEWS

Article Text:

TOM KNAPP

Music, John Gerdy believes, is as important to a good education as reading, writing and arithmetic. "Every day we have examples of how music is such an important component of our educational system, as well as community building," the Conestoga man, himself a musician, author and athlete, said. "It brings people together."

Gerdy said he's frustrated to see music increasingly being cut from school curricula. After all, he said, "incorporating music into the curriculum improves math skills, verbal skills, reasoning skills — right on down the line. The evidence of the importance of music is overwhelming. "It makes you scratch your head every time you turn around and see it being cut."

So Gerdy and his associates — Jeff Thornton, Brett Linder, Charlie Burnett, Tim Brown, Steve Chambers, Bob Esbenshade and Soren West are working to get an organization they call Music for Everyone off the ground.

The fledgling organization is focused on raising funds and awareness, and supporting, through grants, innovative ideas that keep music in the classroom and community. "We are challenging schools, music organizations and community groups to develop exciting and innovative ways to incorporate music into educational and community programs," he said. "We want to harness the power of music."

Gerdy, who performs locally with Willie Marble Xperience, Conestoga Calvary Choir and Jazz Tone Combo, is a former professional basketball player, playing a year in the Continental Basketball Association in 1979-80, and is the author of "Sports: The All-American Addiction."

Earlier this month, Music for Everyone sponsored its first "big event" to raise funds for its grant program. International reggae star Bankie Banx performed for an

invitation-only crowd of about 130 people in Conestoga. ("He's kind of a cross between Bob Marley and Bob Dylan," Gerdy said.) The event raised more than \$13,000, which will be used for future grants. "The concert gave us an opportunity to really get this off the ground," he said. "We hope to begin distributing grants in the spring."

It's a little more involved than just writing a check to someone with an idea, however. "Our vision is not just to give someone a grant and say, 'Good luck.' We want to collaborate, to help them realize their vision and follow up on the idea with research and evaluation," Gerdy said. "We want to form long-term partnerships."

The Banx concert also raised funds for Project Stingray, which helps buy guitars and pay for lessons for students in the singer's native Anguilla.

"We are going to be a locally focused organization, assisting just the Lancaster County area," Gerdy stressed. "But this effort (Project Stingray) is exactly the kind of innovative program we're looking to sponsor here in Lancaster." Music, Gerdy said, is vital to the academic and social development of children. "We now live in a global economy, and our school systems are getting their butts kicked in many ways, when compared to other industrial nations," he said.

"... Music and the arts are absolutely critical. But there's a real gap between the need and the level of funding available. We're hoping to try to fill that gap."

Anyone who wants to become involved with Music for Everyone, has ideas for the organization or wishes to apply for a grant should contact Gerdy at johngerdy@aol.com.

The organization also will be looking for ideas — for future events, merchandising, etc. — to continue to raise funds for the project. "We look at this as a long-term building process," Gerdy said.

E-mail Tom Knapp at tknapp@lnpnews.com.

All content 2005 Lancaster Newspapers Inc. and may not be republished without permission.