

## Band and Orchestra for ALL - Through Gift of Music

Just as different parts dance in harmony along the music staff, several common themes intertwine in this story about a lifelong passion. Those themes are musical instruments sitting lost and forgotten in musty basements, students without the means to buy or rent an instrument, and one man's vision for the community to come together to change lives through the Gift of Music.

"When I was on the St. Louis Park School Board in the late '80s or early '90s," says Jim Rhodes, "A parent called me and told me his son wanted to play trumpet. But the parent had just lost his job and couldn't afford it. It was important for me to help."

And he did, in spades. Rhodes, president of the St. Louis Park Community Band, started the Gift of Music program which gives musical instruments to children who are financially unable to afford them. "We get calls all the time," he says. "I don't know if you want this, but I'm cleaning

out my house so I can move. I found my old flute

from high school. I don't know if it's any good – do you think you can use it?' They donate it to us. If it's unreparable, we use them for parts. Often they can be repaired and they are good as new."

Rhodes developed the program because he wanted all children to experience the joy of making music. "Most of the instruments we donate are owners, not loaners," he says. "It's part of the Children First philosophy. We are in the business to help kids have a chance in life." Research shows that being a musician enhances students' learning abilities, so Gift of Music also provides student scholarships for music lessons and band and orchestra trips to keep kids involved.

The impact of the donations – more than 700 instruments over about 25 years – is big and brassy. About a quarter of orchestra students and half of band students are using school or donated instruments. "When I came to St. Louis Park 23 years ago we had three violins to let students use and large size cellos that didn't quite fit the students' size needs," says Mark Anderson, St. Louis Park elementary and middle school orchestra and music teacher. "A HUGE THANK YOU to people like Jim Rhodes who every year seems to always find orchestra and band instruments for our students. Jim is amazing!"

Jini Block, a band and music teacher at Park Spanish Immersion and Aquila Elementary School, repeats that refrain. "Jim Rhodes and the Gift of Music program has almost doubled the size of the beginning band program in St. Louis Park in the past three years.

The kids and I are all so grateful for the life-changing gift of being able to participate in instrumental music!"

But Rhodes, who's been playing saxophone for 63 years and is not one to, er, toot his own horn, credits all the players involved. Gift of Music is operated by the St. Louis Park Community Band. The St. Louis Park Friends of the Arts, a not-for-profit organization, is the fiscal agent, so donations of money and instruments are tax deductible. The House of Note repairs string instruments. My Music Store repairs band instruments. And of course, instrument donations come from the community.

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For Rhodes, it's a gift that keeps giving. "A parent came up to me at Bruegger's, where I often go for breakfast, and said, 'You don't know me but my kid got an instrument through the Gift of Music, and now he's a music major in college.' It's been really rewarding to me. When I hear these stories I feel so good inside," he said.

Over the years, the Gift of Music program has been promoted in newspaper articles and newsletters and announcements are always made at St. Louis Park Community Band concerts. If you are interested in donating an instrument or making a donation, please contact Jim Rhodes at 952-933-1325 or jr3408@msn.com.

