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The Gift of Giving

By Stephanie Jarvis Campbell

Photo by Elizabeth Brooks

JOY OF MUSIC PROGRAM

From its humble beginnings 32 years in a church room with only 12 preschoolers, the Joy of Music Program has grown to a clientele of more than 500 children and adult students and 40-plus faculty teachers.



The nonprofit music school was founded by Wendy Webster Ardizzone as a way to give children – particularly those who couldn’t afford lessons – a joyful foundation for lifelong musical learning and growth. And even though that was always the vision when she started her music and movement classes back in 1986, “She never envisioned a 20,000-square-foot building, which is what we have now,” said husband and associate director Richard Ardizzone.

That building, on Gorham Street, became JOMP’s home after a fire in June 2000 damaged the First Unitarian Church in Worcester, where it had been a tenant since the beginning. Forced to relocate operations to three different churches, the program started looking at alternatives. By December of that year, JOMP had begun its first capital campaign and purchased its own building, which opened Jan. 3, 2002, after months of renovations.

First and foremost, said Ardizzone, “We’re a community music school. We serve everyone,” noting JOMP currently has 22 classes on the schedule, including music and movement, voice, classical and jazz instrumental ensembles, the youth orchestra and private lessons. Although most students are school-age, many adults attend as well. Students play at local festivals, corporate events, retirement communities, annual meetings and nonprofit events, as well as JOMP recitals in the school’s 200-seat Joseph & Jordan Shapiro Concert Hall.

“At the heart of our mission is our financial aid program,” Ardizzone said, adding that last year, the school distributed approximately \$140,000 in financial aid to 139 students – about 32 percent of JOMP’s total enrollment. “It’s a huge part of our identity.”

“We have kids who have been on financial aid who have gone on to become music teachers. It has a huge impact on kids,” he said of JOMP’s programs.

Although most students attend JOMP just “for the love of music,” whether they take lessons for fun or go on to study music in college, “For us, it’s deeply meaningful work,” Ardizzone said. “We have really close relationships with the kids. We know them for 10 to 13 years because they tend to stay with us. We’re now seeing second-generation kids.”

Because JOMP depends largely on its fundraising campaign for the financial aid program, monetary donations are always welcome and can be made online at its website at jomp.org or by mail to Joy of Music Program, 1 Gorham St., Worcester, MA 01605.