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### Jomp with Joy

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By Taylor Nunez  
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Its story is one that warms the heart and touches the soul. The Joy of Music Program, a community music school in Worcester, was founded by piano teacher Wendy Ardizzone with a couple flyers posted in Worcester and 12 preschoolers enrolled in a few music and movement classes taught in space she rented at the First Unitarian Church. That was in 1987. Today, Joy of Music serves hundreds of students in the area, from preschoolers to senior citizens, and offers a variety of voice, instrumental and movement classes, private lessons, and musical ensembles including its own youth orchestra.

In the beginning, Wendy Ardizzone's program focused on basic singing and movement working with rhythm, utilizing a method of teaching that she had been exploring for some time. But word got out fast. By 1988, the program enrolled more than 100 students.

"So many of the kids were coming back and getting older; they were ready for something else," she remembers, responding to this need by hiring recorder teacher Madeline Browning—the school's first faculty member. For some time, just the two of them ran the classes, but their students craved more. Wendy Ardizzone admits that her intention was not to start a school—but the program took on a life of its own, no doubt nurtured by a shared joy of music. On January 28, the school will celebrate its 25th anniversary at its annual JOMPATHON, a 12-hour showcase of the school's musical talent.

"We had to tell Wendy she had a school on her hands; parents wanted her to hire more teachers and offer more," recalls her husband, associate director Rich Ardizzone, who says the program filled a need in the community. Wendy Ardizzone wanted to give back to the community through raising money for financial aid for students who couldn't afford the classes. "For those reasons, we agreed to form a nonprofit corporation."

The school continued to grow, but in 2000, just a week before the start of Joy of Music's summer program, a fire seriously damaged the First Unitarian Church leaving Joy of Music without a home; but not for long. According to Rich Ardizzone, The Methodist Church immediately reached out to them, offering classroom space in its building. The church cleared out rooms that had been used for storage, and the summer program began only one week late.

“[The Methodist Church] was amazingly accommodating and supportive. That is a perfect example of the history of the school. It wouldn’t be the kind of school it is without that support,” he says, also noting that they had never asked anyone for money, yet received \$25,000 in contributions. The Joy of Music community was touched by the outpouring generosity it received during this trying time.

From its meager beginnings, today the school is operating with a full staff of more than 40, made up of public school teachers, former public school teachers, those who teach or taught private lessons, and freelance musicians.

Joy of Music began celebrating its 25 years this past November with the first of a series of anniversary events—its annual donor thank-you event. “It’s a time that we invite our donors to come to the school and hear some students play. Our donor community is such an important part of the school,” says Wendy Ardizzone.

However, of all the events, JOMPATHON is one that truly represents the Joy of Music community, she says. It’s a time for the community to reaffirm its commitment to the school’s mission – to be accessible. It’s also a major fundraiser for the school – Joy of Music hopes to raise \$10,000 at this year’s JOMPATHON through donations and student’s pledges. Although there is no admission to the event, donations are certainly welcome, but not required.

Last year the school raised more than \$110,000 overall, which was awarded in financial aid; the goal this year is to raise \$120,000. Over all the years, the Ardizzones calculate they have raised more than \$1.1 million just for financial aid.

“It’s a whole community of people who are responsible for the success of a nonprofit like this,” says Rich Ardizzone of the school that was never supposed to be. “This mission [to foster community through accessible music education and performance] attracted a lot of talented people.”

*Witness this incredible community of talent at JOMPATHON at the Joy of Music Recital Hall at 1 Gorham Street in Worcester from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. For more information, visit [jump.org](http://jump.org).*