

SCHOOLS

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3A

Sharing the joy of music

Students donate their instruments

by Sarah Anderson
Reporter

At the Montessori School of Wilton, students have a golden rule.

"Civitas," Latin for citizenship, "means putting other people before yourself," said Zach Brace, one of six sixth-year students who have been doing just that.

Along with Zach, Dobson Cooper, Ian McBrayer, Sam Czaja, Emily Malner and Kika Bruni have organized a drive to collect instruments for Kids Empowered by Your Support, or KEYS, a nonprofit program that brings music education to underprivileged youth in Bridgeport.

Through their efforts at the school and their own generosity, these six students have donated nearly 20 instruments since first starting the drive in February.

Students first learned of the program back in winter when their phenomenology class was studying the idea of generosity. To teach them about being generous, the students invited their choral director and KEYS founder Rob Silvan to speak to them about his work in Bridgeport.

Mr. Silvan told them about a trip he had taken to Nicaragua. Inspired by witnessing children there who had no access to musical instruments or instruction, Mr. Silvan returned home determined to find a way of giving back to the community, and in



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Montessori sixth graders Dobson Cooper, Ian McBrayer, Zachary Brace, Kika Bruni, Emily Malner and Sam Czaja have donated nearly 20 instruments with the help of their teacher and KEYS co-founder Rob Silvan.

the spring of 2004 he founded KEYS.

At first, the program consisted of one instructor, Mr. Silvan, and the four students he had volunteered to teach piano. Today, the program's students number over 150, and music instruction is provided for piano, guitar, flute, violin, cello, trumpet, clarinet, recorder, and drums.

According to Mr. Silvan, when he finished telling his story to the six sixth years, their reaction was instantaneous.

"Spontaneously every student was saying 'I have an instrument I can give!,'" he said.

"I thought, if I'm not using it, someone should," said Zach, who gave his electric guitar. "It felt good to give an instrument."

Not satisfied with giving their instruments alone, the six students spread the word throughout the school, organizing a schoolwide drive.

Soon donated instruments were stacked high outside the music room.

"I wish we had a picture

of it," said Mr. Silvan. "It was beautiful."

Instruments donated so far include several keyboards, guitars, a violin, a trumpet, a flute, a recorder, and more.

"I didn't think we would get that much," said Sam, who also donated a guitar.

Many of the instruments donated are now being used by third and fourth grade students in Bridgeport. When these students received their new instruments, they were "blown away," said Mr. Silvan.

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The kids of Ms. Zeman's class are hoping to spread the

drive throughout Wilton and their hometowns, and plan on continuing to support KEYS when they move on to the middle school next year.

Empowering kids

KEYS visits schools across Bridgeport, and with the help

of school administration, determines which students will most benefit from the program.

"Sometimes it's the kids that are the most musical," said Mr. Silvan. "But sometimes it's the kids that are troubled that get the most out of it."

For some students having a hard time, music can be an important outlet. One student, a second grader who had been acting out, found his outlet through the piano.

"He was a bully," said Mr. Silvan. "But when he heard piano lessons outside in the hall, he was enthralled."

When KEYS offered him piano lessons, "he became completely focused," said Mr. Silvan.

Mr. Silvan also emphasized the opportunity to grow that music provides for those with learning disabilities.

"Sometimes kids have great musical potential even when they can't add numbers," he said.

Nearly half of Bridgeport's public school students drop out of high school, and many students of KEYS come from families who have never been to college.

"I know exactly where each donated instrument goes," said Mr. Silvan, who added if a student in the program attends lessons for a year, the student is allowed to keep the instrument.

Donated instruments that are not taught by KEYS instructors still find homes with students.

Anyone interested in donating an instrument to KEYS may contact Rob Silvan at the Montessori School by calling 203-834-0440, or visit keys-music.org for more information.

"We all know the joy of playing an instrument," said Kika, who gave a guitar. "Music always stays with you."