

## TUTORING NEWS: EPWORTH TUTORING PROGRAM

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### PIANO INSTITUTE: THE 4<sup>TH</sup> SUMMER OF PIANO LESSONS

The Epworth Summer Music Institute, offering free piano lessons to students of the tutoring program, is in its 4<sup>th</sup> summer, with 50-60 students participating. Volunteer "piano tutors" help the students twice a week for an hour as they practice and learn new skills.

At the beginning of the summer we were surprised at the students. Children who had piano lessons last summer *had taught their friends during the year!* Anayeli (age 8) practiced all the songs she had learned last year and taught her cousins Nereida and Maribel the first songs in the book. Johnesha (age 9) taught her neighbor Kenneth two songs. Many students remembered things from last year. Ramiro (age 9) played two songs by memory from last year. He said his cousin Lucas (age 8) "always plays the keyboard!" Shanece (age 10) got a keyboard at the end of last summer and practiced all year. On Manuel's first day of lessons this summer, his face beamed as he heard the beautiful music he was making.

### FIRST PIANO RECITAL: 49 SOLOISTS!

We couldn't believe it when 49 students played pieces for the first recital, July 24. This included 47 children and two seniors. It was a marathon of performers, one after the other, a beautiful community celebration. All the students performed well, playing pieces a level beyond last summer. Two students announced the program, and another took photos. The students are more and more at ease playing for people.

Over 100 people were present, from preschool children through senior citizens. Young and old got to listen to a concert of live music. It was a real gift to the community to be entertained by live music, performed by friends and neighbors.

Remi's mother said afterwards, "It was beautiful—families coming together to enjoy something meaningful. A *positive* thing is going

on. Three years ago when I came to a Parent's Night with a friend, I saw what a good thing it was, and I wanted my son to be a part of it. Now he's doing so well. This is really beautiful."

One student with remarkable progress was Andrew. When he sat down to the keyboard, he was in control. He had perfect concentration and he took command of the music. His piano playing had strength and confidence, and he enjoyed playing. Andrew and Johnny N. were the song leaders for the opening song. One adult remarked, "It was worth coming just to see Andrew stand up there singing. When he first came when he was 5 years old, he couldn't talk. He pulled on my shirt to communicate. And now we see him at age 12, standing up, leading the singing. It's remarkable."

A highlight of the evening was Emily A. playing "When the Saints Go Marching In." People started clapping, and they sang along. Emily played it an extra time because people like it so much.

One parent liked the last two pieces so much, she wanted the notes so her daughter could learn them. A girl who came with her cousins wanted to start taking lessons. Some of the families gave the performers roses after they played.

Fred Burke, a member of Epworth Church, came to the recital and was overwhelmed at the number of piano students performing and the presence of so many families from the community. Afterwards he remarked solemnly, "It made my day! No, it made my *week!*" Wanda R., who played in the recital along with her three grandchildren, said, "You do my family proud!" Everyone enjoyed the concert and felt it was a thrilling occasion.

The following Sunday during the time of Joys and Concerns, there was joyful electricity in the air as person after person told about the recital.

**EMAIL FROM JENNIFER KELLY,  
PIANO TUTOR OF 2002**

June 2003. Beth, How are you? I have attached an email I sent to my friends and colleagues regarding the need for tutors this summer. I hope that you feel it does a good job of advocating for your program. The children are so important and I wanted to do whatever was within my current capabilities to help.

I am very sad and disappointed to let you know that I cannot enjoy teaching with you and the kids this summer. My health has deteriorated so I am mostly homebound at this time. It really changed my life and outlook last summer. What you have set up there is marvelous and I pray that someday soon I will be in better shape to share my training with others.

Peace and joy to you! Jennifer Kelly

Here's the email I sent:

Hi, everybody! Hope the nice weather is treating you well. I have some music oriented information for you. Here we go:

There is a summer piano/music tutoring program in the neighborhood of the Berwyn Red Line EL stop. That's the Edgewater, Uptown and Roger's Park area. Last summer I worked with some amazing students teaching piano at various levels of expertise. This is a non-traditional environment. It is a 3 month program taught in the basement community rooms of the Epworth church. The children learn piano on electric keyboards and a few actual pianos. (They are always needing more keyboard donations.)

This program is very important for many reasons. Here are a few:

1. The children and young adults who come to learn piano do not have access to music on a regular basis let alone on a one to one basis.
2. They have a chance to learn how to play an instrument which will benefit them in the long run by enhancing their learning abilities and strategies, abstract thinking and processing skills.
3. They will be exposed to the beauty of music and the importance that it has in the world.
4. Every student who learns a little will be passing on something of music to the world. It is vital to keep it alive.
5. And, maybe most importantly, each student is learning to value themselves more through

the success they experience as a result of hard work, and praise from mentors/teachers.

Many, if not most, of the children are from under-served populations and would not have any other place to explore the musical side of their minds and souls.

This program needs teachers who can volunteer on ANY basis. Last summer I did approx. 2 hours a week, but even one 30 minute session (the length of a lesson) is extremely valuable. The teacher does not have to be a concert pianist or a certain age. Teenagers to seniors have been teaching there. Be able to read music, play a bit of piano and like to help kids. :)

During the summer session there are several recitals and outings for the students to show their progress and talents.

I just want to say that even though I can't teach this summer, the experience changed me. The children are so eager to learn and I would see them soak up the information and make quick progress. They are all provided with the same piano method series and their progress is charted on daily sheets. Some of the kids come in every day of the week to learn and practice. They had no other time in THE WHOLE YEAR to have the piano at their disposal.

SO, if anybody knows someone who has a bit of time to help out it would be life-changing for another person. Call or email the Epworth Tutoring Program. The music program is only in the summers. During the academic year, there is an after-school academic tutoring program. I believe it's been going on for almost 20 years.

SO, if you know any students home for the summer in Chicago, or anyone else let them know of this opportunity.

Thanks for taking time to ponder my message. Peace! --Jennifer Kelly

### **PERFORMING FOR THE KIWANIS CLUB AT THE CALO RISTORANTE**

Seventeen children and two seniors performed piano solos for members of the Kiwanis Club at

the Calo Ristorante. What a treat to be invited to play for them!

We took a keyboard, amplifier, and the music books, and walked to the restaurant on Clark St. The children were a little intimidated by the somber surroundings of the restaurant. A 6-year old girl started to cry, but soon recovered when she got to pass out programs to everyone.

The children looked beautiful, behaved well, and played beautifully. After all the students performed, the Kiwanis Club treated them to pizza (delicious). It was a beautiful day, and a beautiful trip.

### **PIANO STUDENTS PLAY AT THE ALDEN-LAKELAND NURSING HOME**

Sixteen performers and eight other people went to play music for the residents of the Alden-Lakeland Nursing Home. We took a keyboard, stand, amplifier, and microphone and music books, and were ready to perform.

Before we went we gave a context to some of the boys about not playing around. A 9-year old who had been there to sing in April said, "If someone vomits, don't look at it. That happened last time." When we arrived and were getting set up, students quietly said, "It smells like pee in here, and there's a fishy smell. Why is that man talking to himself?"

The program went very well. Fourteen children and two seniors performed. Two students announced the program as the 16 students performed beginning piano pieces on the keyboard. One student took pictures of the performers, three students were song leaders, and another student sang a solo. The residents joined in singing "I've Got Peace Like a River," "The Greatest Love of All," (which was accompanied by student Monique Smith), and "Amazing Grace," the last verse of which "Praise God, praise God..." was suggested by a resident when the Epworth Youth Choir sang there in April.

The residents enjoyed the concert. They were very attentive while all the students played. One man sang along when several of the students were playing their pieces. When Stephanie Nichols sang the solo, "What a Difference You've Made in My Life," people were so affected by it they started clapping

before she even reached the last note. The last song was "Amazing Grace," which everyone sang strong. The song was particularly beautiful in that nursing home where people are so lonely and ill. Afterwards one of the residents wanted to have her picture taken with the children. When the children were getting on the elevator to leave, one of the residents wheeled herself onto the elevator to go with them and hung onto the bar while a staff person tried to bring her back.

The Alden-Lakeland is the nursing home where a former parent/tutor/Girl Scout leader, Gigi Head, is staying. At first we thought Gigi Head would be too sick to come into the dining room to listen, but she came, all smiling, in her wheelchair and was there for the whole concert.

Wanda Robinson, a grandparent who came with the group and performed, had never met Ms. Head before. Wanda said afterwards, "I know she'll go to heaven." Why? "because there is a glow about her. That is why I wanted to hold her hand afterwards and have my picture taken with her."

Glennis Doyle, came with us because she knew Gigi from the First UM Church in Evanston when Gig worked with the preschool there. Ms. Doyle was very taken with the children playing for the residents and with the whole event. Afterwards she wrote a note to Eva Schwinge, Girl Scout leader and coordinator of the Tutoring Preschool: "The spirit of God was present there."

The Alden-Lakeland is also where the grandfather of the Anderson children, four of our students, is staying – on a different floor from Gigi Head. The week after our concert, the Anderson children walked to the Alden-Lakeland, carrying their keyboard, and they all played their piano pieces for their grandfather.

### **THE FINAL RECITAL: 38 PERFORM ON 100° DAY**

When the temperature was the hottest of the year, 100°, we knew that whatever students came to perform and whatever family members

and friends came to listen, were a committed people. Several students didn't come (there was a heat stroke in one family—the person recovered), but 38 students came to perform, and at least 97 people came to listen to the beginning piano students play their pieces.

The concert featured students accompanying the singing on two songs, Johnesha Jones and Czarina Cariño. It is difficult for a beginning piano student to do that, and the songs came out beautifully. Another highlight was two brothers playing a duet, Andrew and Andre Anderson played "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" as a round. That also is difficult for beginning students. Emily Acevedo was prepared to accompany her sister Reyna with a duet part, but Reyna didn't come.

**Milestones:** Vivian could not speak or understand English, so lessons were difficult. In the first recital and the trip to the nursing home, she was so nervous that she had to start over 4-5 times, and the pieces still were not good. By the final recital, she could understand a little English, she attempted to say a couple of words in English, and she played her piece perfectly! When she finished playing her parents beamed the hugest smiles of anyone the whole day. Vivian did well!!!

After the first recital, Jennyfer's mother, Veronica Rodriguez, wanted to come for beginning piano lessons. Her 24-month old daughter often took her attention away from practicing, but Veronica was diligent and came 2-3 times a week to work on the beginning pieces. We noticed that she had to get her eyes within 5" of the paper to see small details, so the Tutoring Program offered to pay for glasses, part of our educational service to families, and the glasses arrived the day before the recital. One of the students (Johnesha) wanted to play "Amazing Grace" for the concert, and we wanted to find a student who could lead the song in Spanish while someone was leading it in English. We asked the daughter Jennyfer, and she felt she would be too afraid. Then Veronica, her mother, said she would like to lead it in Spanish. She had never sung it before, but she wanted to do it anyway. We got her a copy of the words, and rehearsed with her. The

evening of the performance was wonderful. Veronica sang well. It was a momentous evening. The student photograph snapped a picture of Veronica just after she had finished playing her piece, "Merrily We Roll Along," and she just glowed. At the end of the concert she was so grateful to be a part of the recital that she and Jennyfer gave a bouquet of flowers to her teacher Beth Palmer, who was so touched that tears came to her eyes.

The last student on the program, before the final song, was Monique Smith playing "Can You Feel the Love Tonight?" The song was 2-3 levels above the songs of the other students, and Monique had complete focus. She had worked hard, and the piece was beautiful. The audience was in awe. It was marvelous. Monique's mother said afterwards, "Monique gets better and better every year."

**Comments after the concert:** Maria and Karla's mother: "They come home after their piano lessons and practice all afternoon. I want them to continue." Emily's mother: "Emily's going to keep practicing. Another thing, would you like her to be a tutor this year?" Shanece and Joleesa mother: : Thank you so much for including my girls." Ruchi's mother: Thank you for giving my daughter this opportunity. She has always wanted to play the piano, now you have given her a chance to know what it is like." LaDonna's mother, smiling: "It was wonderful!" Johnesha and Johnesha's mother about her talented children: "You made them what they are." Andrew, Latrice, Jasmine, and Andre's mother: "The kids were up until 1 am last night playing the two keyboards, playing their pieces over and over and over! We took one of the keyboards to the nursing home today (in 100° heat) so they could play for my father." Eva Schwinge, the Girl Scout leader: "The students are so poised! I see it in their carriage. What a change from last year! They're comfortable in performing."

### PROGRAM GROWS OVER LAST YEAR

	2002	2003	% ↑
Students participating	55	63	15% ↑
Students playing in 1 or 2 recitals	45	54	20% ↑

Students going on one or more trips to play for community	29	42	45%↑
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Last year 55 students participated in the program; this year 63 participated, a 15% increase. This includes two senior citizens (a grandparent and a neighborhood tutor), one parent, and two college students who were grads of the tutoring program. Last year 45 students played in one or more recitals at Epworth; this year 54 played, a 20% increase. Last year 29 children went on one or more trips to play pieces for nursing homes or the Kiwanis Club. This year 42 students went.

### **STUDENTS PERFORM DINNER MUSIC AT THE METHODIST HOME**

The concert was much anticipated. When we brought the electric piano and amplifier into the dining room, the residents were expecting us. A woman said, "I wondered when you were coming." A man said, "I remembered when the children came last year."

Sixteen children and one adult performed beginning piano pieces, and the residents joined the children in singing three songs. The highlight of the evening was Johnesha playing, "My First Waltz."

The residents loved the children, and they loved the concert. Everyone had ecstatic smiles. Many said to come again. One woman waved her hands in excitement and said over and over again, "I love children. This was so good. Come again. Come again."

One of the parents, Ms. Tripp, who chaperoned, said, "I wouldn't miss the concert at the Methodist Home for anything! Even if I were in excruciating pain from arthritis, I'd go to see the children playing for the residents. It brings everyone such joy!"

### **DIFFICULTIES AND JOYS OF THE LESSONS**

When the Music Institute began in June 2000 we didn't know if children would come at regularly scheduled times during the summer. We were surprised then and now that students came. Children came after summer school, after swimming, after day camp, or from playing in the playground. One boy had been

out playing with his older brother and came in carrying his skateboard, hot and sweaty on a 90° day. Some children came with encouragement from their parents; others came entirely on their own.

Some children were very tired during their lesson. They said they had stayed up very late the night before, and we suggested they go to bed earlier. One boy said he was up until 1 am and then woke up at 5 am. We asked if he had a noisy apartment, he gave a sad nod.

One girl said she had had no breakfast or lunch that day and little food the previous day. When we probed further, she said firmly, "You don't understand. There is no food at home."

The children enjoyed the lessons, but often they didn't think they could play a certain piece. With the tutors' patience and encouragement, the children learned to play the pieces – every one!

It was wonderful to see some of the boys, almost street children, concentrating intently, reading the notes of a piece, trying to figure out how to play it. They always succeeded.

When the children finally learned a piece, they were so happy. One girl always clapped her hands loudly. Another shouted out, "I got it!" Another student beamed and said, "I like that piece." One student said, "Yesterday that piece and I had a terrible fight. Today we're friends."

A grateful foster parent said, "I remember when Andre didn't dare to get up in front of people, and look at him now. Everything is fine. And playing the keyboard is wonderful therapy for Andrew's stiff fingers which were injured through child abuse. The piano is wonderful for my children."