

Street Final



Portland weather

Rain most of the day

High 48, low 46

See back of Business

The Oregonian

35¢



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CHARLES LEWIS,
FOUNDER OF ETHOS INC.



FREDRICK D. JOE/THE OREGONIAN

Dave Coyle, a music teacher at Ethos, gives a piano lesson to Nathan Arnold, 10, at the nonprofit's headquarters in Northeast Portland. Founded to offer music lessons to children who can't afford them, Ethos has expanded as school budget cuts have reduced music classes.

Scales on a sliding scale

As school bands fall silent, Portland children have another chance to learn music, at Ethos

By **FRED LEESON**
THE OREGONIAN

Any number of Harvard University graduate students had passed through Boston's historic nonprofit folk music center, Club Passim, working on research papers.

"They would write their papers and get their credit," said Betsy Siggins Schmidt, the club manager. "Very few have had any real impact on the club."

But in 1999, one stood out in Schmidt's mind: Charles Lewis, a University of Portland graduate who was working on a master's degree in public policy.

"He was here all the time," Schmidt recalled of Lewis' yearlong project. "He was involved in all aspects of everything. When he was done, he put together this huge prospectus of what we did well and what we didn't do well. It was like a big road map outlining each step on a to-do list and how to get there."

With his degree in hand and music in his head,

Lewis returned to Portland in 1999. Charging the early expenses to his credit card, he formed Ethos Inc., and started implementing his ideas about bringing music education to children and schools that couldn't afford it.

His timing couldn't have been more helpful. As money tightened in the public schools, music was often one of the first things cut.

Though soft-spoken by nature, Lewis has strong feelings about the importance of music to youngsters.

"Innately, music is part of the human experience," he said. "The research is proving that music is important developmentally." College aptitude test scores are routinely higher for students who learn music.

"It was something I had when I was growing up," said Lewis, whose family lived in several Western states when he was young. "By about the third grade, it wasn't a question of whether you'd play an

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ETHOS INC.

What: A nonprofit corporation that promotes music and music education for schools and schoolchildren who otherwise might not have access to music training.

Music taught: A wide range of instruments, including piano, guitar, drums, strings, horns, woodwinds and harmonica, and styles, including jazz, reggae, hip-hop and classical.

Contributions accepted: As a registered charitable organization, contributions to Ethos are tax-deductible. It also accepts donations of musical instruments, which are restored and used by students.

Further information: www.ethos-inc.com

Ethos: Nonprofit strives to fill a musical void

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instrument but which one."

Ethos has grown from its inception with 10 kids learning music in a University of Portland basement three years ago. Today:

◆ Approximately 200 Portland students, from elementary through high school, take lessons after school at the Ethos headquarters at 27 N.E. Killingsworth St. They pay fees on a sliding scale ranging from \$65 for eight weeks to as little as nothing.

◆ Approximately 200 more students participate in Music Corps programs run by Ethos at 10 schools or education programs in the Portland area. Ethos gets the programs started with volunteers and paid instructors, then encourages the schools to take over.

◆ Students at about 50 schools a year in the Portland region attend Sound School Assemblies provided by Ethos in which a wide variety of bands perform music and talk to students about their instruments and musical influences.

In addition, Ethos has collected close to 300 donated instruments, many of which it has reconditioned and made available to students at little or no rent. The donated instruments include a wide range of band instruments, plus folk instruments such as guitars, harmonicas and drums.

One of the reasons Lewis picked Portland to start Ethos was cutbacks in the Portland Public

Schools' music programs. At latest count, only 33 of the district's 61 elementary schools still have general music instruction.

Lewis sees cuts in music instruction as a critical loss.

"It is a question of fairness and equal opportunity for kids," he said. "For the kids who can't afford private lessons, it is akin to denying them an equal opportunity to learn."

In the Roosevelt cluster in North Portland, one of the areas that Ethos draws from, only two of six elementary schools and one of two middle schools offer music, said Glenn Ludtke, the school district's performing arts specialist.

Ludtke, who directed the Roosevelt High School band for five years ending in 1999, said the band's size fell from 78 to 26 members as cuts rippled up from the elementary and middle schools.

Given the district's tight finances, he said, "they basically have nowhere else to cut there than the arts, music and libraries."

Ethos is "doing great stuff" trying to fill the voids, Ludtke said. Based on his experience, Ludtke thinks students who play in school bands do better in classes because they learn individual discipline as well as cooperating with groups.

Though Lewis started Ethos on his credit card, he and other twenty-somethings on his staff soon landed grants from foundations, including the Meyer Memorial Trust, Collins Foundation, Na-

tional Foundation for the Arts and the Lorene Sails Higgins Charitable Trust.

Ethos' annual budget stands at \$250,000 and Lewis hopes to keep it there. But he said the organization can't live forever on grants. Foundations often help new organizations get started but want them to become self-sufficient.

"We're at a pivotal point in our development," Lewis said. "We need to change from foundation support to community support. Now we need to get people to help us keep it growing."

Ethos is trying to become self-sufficient by offering annual memberships from \$25 to \$1,000. Perks for members include discounts on lessons, instrument

rentals and recording time, on up to special meals and music performances. Ethos also is recruiting bands from many genres to perform benefit concerts.

At age 31, Lewis has ambitions beyond Ethos. Over the next decade, he hopes to do additional graduate work in nonprofit management and work as a consultant, exploring "nationwide opportunities."

But he thinks Ethos will be in good hands. He is developing a coterie of young staff members such as Michelle Boss Barba, 24, and Adrian Wulff, 27, who are learning Ethos' operations.

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