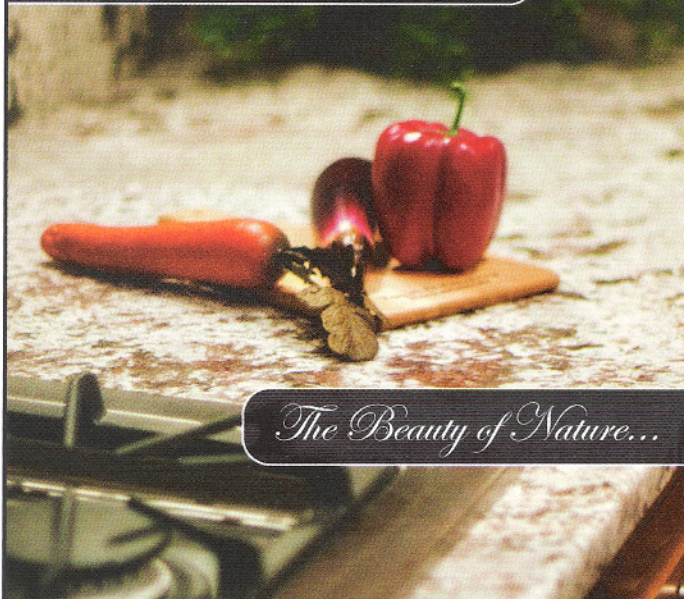


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How Violins Help Kids At Fairview Elementary



Art by Mike Cagle

On a Saturday morning in the spring, two little boys arrived at the IU Musical Arts Center (MAC) hungry. They had last eaten at noon the day before. Despite their empty stomachs, they were ready to perform. The boys—along with 93 other pupils—participate in a violin program at Fairview Elementary School.

Many of Fairview's students live in government-subsidized housing, trailers, and a shelter for abused or homeless families. Yet every first and second grader plays the violin.

"I wanted a program for kids, to reach out to students whose parents might not feel comfortable heading over to the university or who might not be able to afford something like this, and to do it during the school day," says Brenda Brenner, associate professor of music education at IU Jacobs School of Music.

Brenner, along with Kathy Heise, Fairview's music teacher, and Lissa May, associate professor of music at IU, created the program, which launched in 2008 with 46 first graders and a few volunteers. That fall, Shalin Liu, an IU alum, had contacted the music school looking for ways to support at-risk children and the arts. Her organization, the Summer Star Foundation for Nature, Art, and Humanity, now supports Fairview's program, which includes research on the relationship between playing stringed instruments and attendance, reading scores, social values, and behavior.

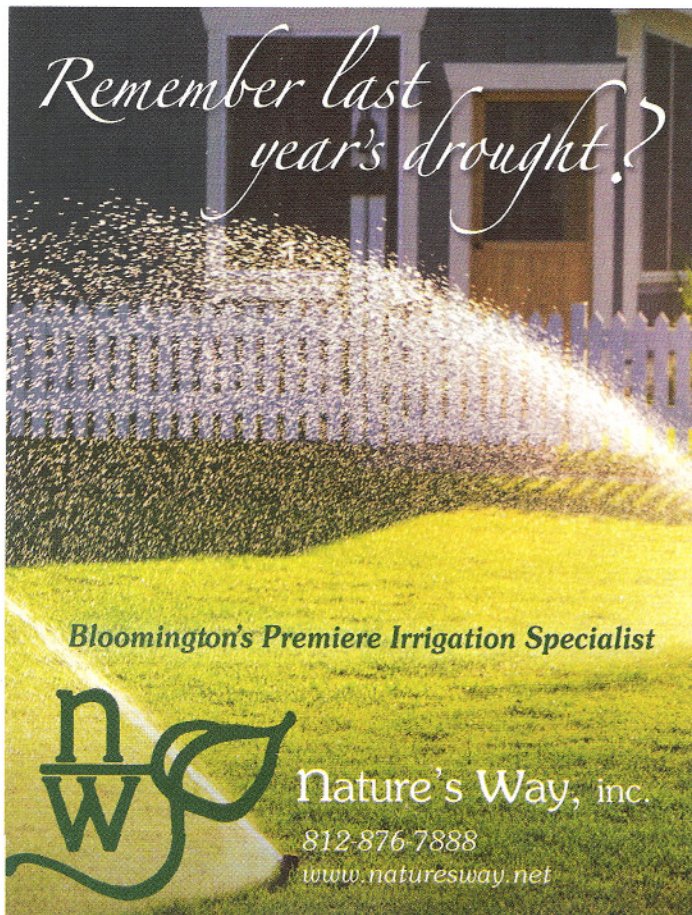
Now in its third year, the program includes all first and second graders, while third graders can participate for a \$25 fee. Brenner seeks sponsorships to cover those fees.

Students in the program participate in an annual concert at the MAC. Last year, a little boy arrived with his mother. "I knew he was living in his car," Brenner says. "She got him a haircut, and she borrowed a suit for him. It matters to these parents that they're able to do these things, even if they're homeless, even if they're in dire circumstances.

"For a lot of these kids, their personal circumstances are heartbreaking," she says. "I'm able to provide them some transcendence of that. For everybody, life has problems, and part of being successful is to be able to break down those problems and to face them head on and to know that you can persist. And I do that on a micro level with the violin."

—Maggie Marton

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