



Payten Richardson, left, and Chloe Wenz of Klickitat School perform during a recent visit to The Dalles.

Lyrical Achievement

Violin lessons expose Klickitat students to music, performance and teamwork

By Jeanie Senior

A small group of small violinists from Klickitat went to The Dalles for their first performance tour at the end of May.

The musicians, members of Brynn Dawson's combined kindergarten/first-grade class at Klickitat School, started before they left with a warm-up session at the high school library.

In The Dalles, they played for audiences at the Oregon Veterans Home and two assisted living facilities. They finished off the trip with lunch at Dairy Queen and a play session at Sorosis Park.

Their program included a song that enumerated the parts of the violin and moved on to a piece played on their small instruments.

The children started studying violin by the Suzuki method in October as part of a five-week pilot program, funded by a grant from Gorge Arts and Education. Linda Robertson, a violin teacher who lives in Trout Lake, taught the twice-a-week classes.

At the end of the pilot sessions, Klickitat School Superintendent Jerry Lynch says, "it became really clear to us that we wanted to continue."



Members of the Klickitat School Suzuki violin class perform during a recent visit to The Dalles. Above, Julie Fink, left, Sage Greeley and Laney Tuthill. Below, Nolan Greenfield and Samantha Knott

Funding from the Klickitat PTO and the school district moved the program forward.

The classes were inspired in part by the Vinca Quartet, a professional music group that performed in Klickitat several times in the past couple of years.

“The Vinca Quartet actually donated the violins to get us started,” Jerry says.

The stringed instruments mostly are one-quarter size or a little larger, scaled to fit the child playing the instrument.

The goal is to continue the program and expand it into second grade, Jerry says. That means purchasing more violins for the larger group at a cost of \$70 to \$150 per violin.

“You can get a pretty durable student violin for about \$100,” Jerry says. “We’re planning on about 10 new kindergartners.”

Jerry does not expect it will be easy to find the funding, but is hopeful it will continue. In addition to learning music, he says, the young players also get lessons in teamwork and personal responsibility.

The young violinists play by feel and sound. Surreal Hawthorne, a local teenager who is an experienced violinist, has worked with them. Linda accompanies the group with a guitar or mandolin.

Jerry says supporters ultimately want the program to continue through third grade.

“Our desired outcome in this is not only to give the kids musical experience, we also know this actually enhances and increases a child’s capacity to learn, specifically in the basic skills area—writing, reading, math,” he says. “What we find is that kids who have this kind of experience at a young age continue over time to learn at higher levels.” ■

