

Pianos enhance Sisters' chorale music program

By Jim Cornelius
News Editor

The Sisters School District's choral music program is rich in the sound of quality piano music.

Program director Rick Johnson took delivery of four pianos last week. A new grand piano will grace the middle school choir room and stage. Three new upright pianos will fill the high school music practice rooms with music.

The pianos were donated by the Snowman Foundation Piano Forte Guild during the annual Ten Grands gala event at the Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall in Portland on April 4.

"The gift of these pianos

is going to take us to the next level as a choral organization," Johnson said. "We have an extremely quality instrument for the middle school vocalists."

The middle school piano was rescued literally from a trash heap and refurbished to "limp it along" as Johnson described it. However, the instrument could never be brought to hold tune and some keys did not work.

Instructor Julie Cash, who accompanies the choirs, is very happy to have the baby grand piano at the middle school.

"It's a beautiful instrument to look at and it great to have all the keys that work," she said.



PHOTO BY CEILI CORNELIUS

Upright pianos will enable sectional rehearsals to help choir singers learn material more efficiently.

Johnson noted that the uprights will provide the ability to do "sectional rehearsals," where portions of a choir can work on specific parts of a piece all at the same time in different places.

"We can learn the music four times faster," Johnson said.

Johnson expressed his appreciation to Sisters Folk Festival Creative Director Brad Tisdell, who connected Johnson with the Snowman Foundation and encouraged him to seek the donation.

Sisters has built a remarkably strong choral music program under Johnson and Cash's direction. Students

have had some remarkable experiences in the program (see related story, page 11).

"Choral music is an incredibly important part of every student's education," Johnson said. "Like a team sport, singing in a choir creates a tight-knit team of individuals who are often from completely different socio-economic backgrounds and cultures. These teammates work together as equals to create a product that is greater than the sum of its parts. Every business model in the world tries to achieve teamwork like this."

That career-related relevance is important in times when schools have to get as

much bang for the buck as possible — and arts programs are vulnerable to cuts.

"Employers love to see choir and music participation on résumés. Students who have been educated in music pay more attention to detail," Johnson said. "Students learn to improve their work, rather than just accepting their first attempt as 'good enough.' Creativity taught in music class develops minds that create the next world innovations. Music education instills life-long skills. Creating and sharing music is a gift to others as well as oneself and prepares students to succeed in society."



PHOTO BY RICK JOHNSON

The middle school has a beautiful new baby grand piano.

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