

Register for Community Chorus tomorrow

Register to sing with the Florence Community Chorus on Thursday, Aug. 29, at 6:30 p.m. at the Presbyterian Church of the Siuslaw, 3996 Highway 101.

Auditions are not required. Rehearsal will follow immediately after registration until 8:30 p.m.

David Aakre will conduct the Chorus. All singers from high school age and up are welcome.

There is a registration fee of \$70 to cover the cost of music and administrative expenses. High school students will automatically receive fee waivers.

The Community Chorus regularly rehearses on Thursday evenings from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. at the Presbyterian Church.

The winter concert will take place on Saturday, Dec. 14, at 7 p.m. and Sunday, Dec. 15, at 2 p.m., both taking place at the Presbyterian Church of the Siuslaw.

For additional information, call 541-997-3469.

Check www.communitychorusflorenceoregon.org for registration forms that may be completed and brought to registration on Aug. 29.

Come sing with community members.

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Tucker has a long history in working with preschool-aged children, working from prenatal to five years, including home visits, and 10 years ago worked to bring Florence's first Montessori School.

"We started as a nonprofit with a board of directors, and myself and two other people were founding members," she said. "We got that up and running and it was really successful."

Around five years ago, Tucker moved into maternal infant health and was also a family resource specialist, but when it was announced that Mapleton would be opening up a new program, she jumped back in.

"I really missed preschool, it was probably one of the funnest jobs I've ever had," she said. "Their minds are so absorbent. They're ready for everything, curious about everything. It's a privilege to share that with them and expose them to the love of learning and nature and all there is to share with children. It's a pretty special place to be."

The program is set to open on Tuesday, Oct. 1, with Tucker and community members renovating the classroom space for the students in the meantime.

"The parent involvement has been extraordinary, but it wasn't just the parents. It was aunts, uncles, grandparents and friends," Tucker said. "They have done most of the work so far to get us to the place where we can start doing what we're doing. I've had a lot of parents helping all day long for three or four days to get our classroom ready to build. So we have just resurfaced the walls and freshened everything up."

The renovations are now complete, and Tucker, along with educational assistant Natalie Ross, who graduated from Mapleton in 2012, will be working on setting

up the classroom itself.

"I've been excited about working with Amber," Ross said. "It's going to be fun working with kids on the building blocks for their whole educational careers. ... Mapleton really focuses so much on giving individual care to all the students because of the small class sizes. They don't have to worry about their kid getting overlooked, there's going to be a lot of loving attention and care. It's a good school."

As for the goals of the preschool, Tucker said it is about, "getting those four-year-olds who are turning five this year ready for kindergarten. We want to engage families and have them feel comfortable. This is going to be a great place for their kids to complete their preschool experience, and use it as a resource in the community."

Tucker pointed out that she is also a family resource specialist and will be able to assist parents in a variety of aspects in helping parents and children with educational needs.

"We're creating a building block for a lifetime of learning here," Tucker said.

A step up from preschool finds the Mapleton district's next new recruit, kindergarten teacher Dana Silvani.

"It's always been my favorite grade. I just love how they're coming into school with really no experience, and they're just an open mind and willing to learn everything," Silvani said. "I'm really looking forward to working with them on social skills and creating friendships with them, and just teaching them how to be little humans that interact with the world."

This will be Silvani's first time having her own classroom, having been a substitute in Eugene.

"I'm definitely nervous, I'm also really excited," she said. "I love that Mapleton has smaller class sizes.

You're really able to personalize each student's education. I really want my classroom to be a welcoming and accepting place for these students, and to be their safe space where they're comfortable to learn and to share everything, and come to me when they have problems."

The most difficult challenge for the grade is getting all the students on the same page — "Some kids might know the whole alphabet, some kids might know a few letters," she said. "You don't really know the academic background they're coming with, and trying to match all of their levels."

But when those differences begin to mesh, "I really enjoy when the kids get that 'ah-ha' moment and something clicks for them. I want a strong classroom environment where they'll learn how to read and write, plus social skills and how to interact with other classmates. We're making responsible citizens."

The kindergarteners will also be working with new teacher Nathan Westerby, who will be teaching K-12 physical education, as well as middle school and high school health. The Nebraskan native, who recently taught in Willamina, Ore., in a temporary educator position, is excited to be building a program that can follow through an entire student's career.

"I thought it was a unique opportunity to teach K-12, not a lot of other places you can do that," Westerby said. "I get the kindergarteners and the kids who are basically adults. Huge range, with a lot of planning, but I think in the end it will all be worth it."

On the physical education portion, Westerby said that he wants to ensure the students are in shape and healthy.

"I've been in places before where kids have struggled skipping up and down on one foot in middle school. I felt bad for the kids. I want to give them a basis in order to not be in that kind of position," he said.

As for overall health, Westerby said that he wanted to create strong relationships between the students where they will be physically and psychologically safe.

"For me, teaching is a lot about relationships," he said. "Just being there for the kids, having fun. I essentially am a grown-up child who plays games all day. I just like to get out

there, enjoy it, have some fun."

Middle and high school students will be met by new teacher Rachel Claric, who will be teaching language arts for seventh- through 12th-grades, as well as a lifetime fitness course.

"I've been out of teaching for a year, so I decided I wanted to come back. I grew up in Noti, so Mapleton is not completely unknown to me," she said. "I thought it would be a nice change of pace and a good opportunity. I've never been on this small of staff before."

For Claric, teaching is all about passion.

"I want the students to come away with the idea that they should have a passion for something, whether it's English or not," she said. "That happens to be one of my passions, but it doesn't mean it has to be their passion. I want to help them figure out what their passion is, as well as figuring out what are they thinking of doing after high school and where they want to go."

Finally, Mapleton is bringing in its first school counselor for all grades with new hire Brittany Anderson.

"I grew up in Florence, and my mom actually graduated from Mapleton," she said. "I'm really excited to be here because it's so small. The students won't be just faces, I'll actually know them. Most schools have one counselor for 400 or more kids just in the high school. Here, it's 150 for all schools, so I think that's pretty cool."

As to why a student would come to see Anderson, the reasons are complex.

"It could be friend stuff, it could be family stuff, it could be issues at school, it could be just someone to talk to or it could be having issues with schoolwork," she said. "There's a ton of different things that students will come see me for."

And when students do come and see her, Anderson hopes that they will feel able to talk about anything.

"I'm open and super non-judgmental," she said. "I have an open-door policy, so students can come see me for whatever they want. What I'd like them to get from me is feeling empowered to make their own decisions, and that they have the ability to make good choices all the time."

Mapleton School District starts school next week. For more information about the district, visit www.mapleton.k12.or.us.

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