

LIFE/FAMILY

THE KEENE SENTINEL SUNDAY, MARCH 9, 2008 Page C-1

Apple Hill celebrates anniversary with new and old

In 2008, Apple Hill Center for Chamber Music has two causes for celebration: a new executive director and the 20th anniversary of its Playing for Peace program.

The nonprofit was founded in 1971 by a small group of volunteers who believed that chamber music, performed without a conductor, could create harmony among people in conflict.

Since 1988, the Apple Hill Chamber Players quartet has toured American inner cities and beleaguered areas of the world, including the Middle East, Ireland and Asia.

At each destination, the group performs concerts and conducts classes and workshops. It also awards scholarships to young musicians for the annual International Summer Music Festival in Nelson. There, hundreds of musicians of different nationalities, ages and abilities live, study and perform public concerts side by side at the group's rural 100-acre campus.

The organization faced both management and financial challenges following the departure last summer of founding member and executive director Eric Stumacher. In October, the board of

trustees chose longtime viola teacher and two-year board member Lenny Matczynski as his successor. A current Boston Conservatory faculty member, he was also associated with Emmanuel Music, a Boston-based professional Bach cantata performance group.

"Apple Hill is ready for some new things — consolidating, building, growing," Matczynski said. "What I bring to the table is that I'm a trained musician, artist and performer. I'm also an administrator, and I teach. That's rare. Those three elements are what I bring to Apple Hill. As an artist, new ideas, new focus. As an administrator, just looking at everything that needs to improve."

"But there's nothing big to change, really," he said. "We're focusing all our energies and looking at everything we do to make it better and more efficient," he said.

To that end, the organization is in the midst of formulating a multi-year strategic plan for programs, buildings and grounds. Reconstruction of the rehearsal barn into a community center will be finished in June.

Further, some program changes and additions are in place. The Chamber Players, who for many years included pianist Stumacher, are now a string quartet. This year's tour destinations include Jordan and Cyprus as well as Memphis, Tennessee. There are plans to expand the program into new countries.

The nonprofit has also launched a number of initiatives: Chamber musi-

Making a
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cians put on a workshop at Bates College in Maine. And, besides its public onsite summer concerts, the group now brings music to other parts of the Monadnock Region. Concerts were performed last year in Keene, Peterborough and Harrisville, and that series will continue this year in other local communities.

"It gives the Players work," said Matczynski. "They can work on their repertoire. Almost all composers wrote something for string quartet. There's a whole body of repertoire."

Beyond that, the organization hopes

to increase its scholarship fund for young musicians, with community support.

Meanwhile, the nonprofit invites the community to join its year-long celebration of two decades creating peace through music.

"In this area, an arts organization in a rural setting is a great place for artists to be who they are with space and freedom," said Matczynski.

"Playing for Peace is about kids from all over the world," he said. "It's kind of amazing."

~ Joan Geary

The agency

Apple Hill Center for Chamber Music

410 Apple Hill Road, P.O. Box 217, Sullivan 03445; 847-3371

www.applehill.org

The particulars

Executive director: Lenny Matczynski; board president: Dita England

Founded: 1971

Service area: Entire Monadnock Region; areas of conflict in the U.S., Middle East, Asia and Europe

Annual budget: \$874,000

Staff: 2 full-time, 6 part-time, 100 volunteers, 55 seasonal staff and faculty members

Mission

Promotes peace and understanding through the transformative power of playing and teaching chamber music around the world.

"Making a Difference," a weekly feature, is a collaborative project of The Keene Sentinel and Giving Monadnock, which seeks to raise public awareness of the role of nonprofit agencies in the Monadnock Region. For more information, e-mail info@givingmonadnock.org or call 357-7171.