

String Program Tuning Up in the New River Valley

(excerpted from an article by Heather Southard appearing in the January-March 2000 issue of *Expressions*)

With the formation this fall of the Blacksburg Community String Orchestra, Blacksburg Parks and Recreation has added the long awaited string component to its already multifaceted community music program. Alan Armstrong, Carol Stone, and Anneke Sanzenbach worked to create the new orchestra with the help of Ed Schwartz, director of the Blacksburg Community Band. These die-hard members of the pit orchestra from the Summer Musical Enterprise wanted to keep playing all year round and provide the opportunity for other string players to join in.

An eclectic membership of about 20 cellists, violinists, violists, and even a bass player meet weekly under the direction of Elizabeth Austin, a talented teacher and cellist with the Roanoke Symphony. The group happily encompasses a wide range of ages and experience. Middle-schoolers try their skills among the second violins while composer and violist John Howell has composed for the group the beautiful "Suite in Five Moods" for Wire Choir. Mr. Howell leads the viola section. Selections from Five Moods debuted at the orchestra's first concert at Custom Catering in December 1999.

The orchestra plans to expand this spring with the establishment of the Blacksburg Children's String Orchestra. This program will provide many string students in the area with a much needed social and musical outlet for their talents.

Carol Stone, a local parent and violin teacher, long interested in community music development, believes these new string programs in the New River Valley are very exciting. Says Ms. Stone, "There are a lot of characters around here, children and adults alike, who have something to say when they rosin up their bows. There are also many professional musicians interested in community service. These high quality recreational programs will give string players a delightful opportunity to meet one another, study, perform, and have a great time together. We are so happy to have the support and sponsorship of the Town of Blacksburg."

Those interested in more information regarding the Blacksburg Community String Orchestra should contact Blacksburg Parks and Recreation. The string orchestra rehearses in the Blacksburg Middle School on Mondays from 7:30 to 9:00 pm.