

The fingers of Kathleen Williams, 13, stroke the piano keys during a Belnstrumental music class at the Friendly Center.



# GIVING BACK

## Philanthropists loan instruments to needy kids



Instructor Meaghan Roberts teaches her Belnstrumental music class at the Friendly Center.

By ROSE RUSSELL  
BLADE STAFF WRITER

**W**hat do a lawyer, a sales manager, and a business development associate have in common?

In Toledo the answer is a passion to fill a void left after northwest Ohio public schools wielded budget-cutting knives and eliminated music programs.

Rather than wag their heads and lament the loss of efforts to develop well-rounded students, professionals John Mackewich, Jeff Green, and Mike Grady organized the Belnstrumental Foundation in the fall of 2009.

"We formed the group to give back to the community and to fill the void as a result of the constant cuts in arts and music. All of us have music backgrounds," Mr. Mackewich, president of Belnstrumental, said.

"Our mission is to ensure that all kids in northwest Ohio have musical education," he said.

Mr. Mackewich is an attorney and plays bass. Mr. Green, vice president of the foundation, is a sales manager and plays trombone, and Mr. Grady is a business development associate who also plays trombone.

The foundation has helped about 275 students since its inception. The group takes a three-pronged approach to meeting that goal: It provides music classes for students in schools that do not offer music; lends instruments to music students, and lines up professional musicians to conduct classes.

"We have an instrument bank for any kid who needs an instrument and we will give it free to use in the school year. Likewise, if a school calls and asks for five violins, we give them,"

Mr. Mackewich said. Its bank includes 60 instruments, including violins, trumpets, saxophones, cellos, guitars, and clarinets.

There is no cost for students. They are asked to sign an agreement stating that an instrument is on loan to them as long as they are in a music program, and if they drop out, that they will return it.

Belnstrumental's six-member board buys instruments or collects them from others who no longer use them. Anyone who has an instrument sitting around collecting dust can give it to the foundation. Instruments that need to be repaired, then sent to a school.

"So far we have received every instrument back that we have loaned out. A few get broken now and then, but that comes with the trade," he added.

In its first year, Belnstrumental started loaning instruments. The second year the focus was on after-school programs. This year, Mr. Mackewich said the group wants to expand music programs in after-school programs and community centers.

Fund-raising efforts and donations support Belnstrumental.

"All we do is free to community centers, and we raise funds to do that," he added. "The biggest benefit to us is letting them know that if there is a parent whose kid wants to take up music, they can contact us and we can help them with that."

Students, parents, and schools interested in obtaining an instrument from the group's instrument bank can call 419-798-6683.

Contact Rose Russell at [russell@theblade.com](mailto:russell@theblade.com) or 419-724-6178.

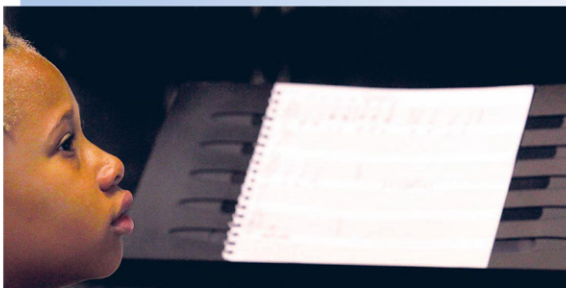


BLADE PHOTOS BY ANDY MORRISON

**Paulette Rice, 16, is all smiles as she learns to play the piano.**



Omolara Ayodeji, 12, tests her skills on the piano during the class.



Kennedy Watson, 7, listens carefully to the music instructor.



Lynae Fisher, 13, listens as Paulette Rice, 16, plays the piano.

