



# String Department Showcase

Forest Lake School District  
by Brian Cole

We are fortunate in Minnesota to have had several new string programs started in the past 10 years. One of those new programs is the Forest Lake School district. And while there are several districts in our state with a rich, long history of string activity, it is especially encouraging to hear the excitement that these new programs are creating in their community.

Forest Lake is located about a half hour north-east of downtown St. Paul. Although there is some industry in the community, many of its citizens commute to the Twin Cities for work.

Started at the superintendent's request in 1993, the program has grown from having one full-time teacher to three in the six years since its inception. The district has one 10-12 High School, two 7-9 Junior High Schools, and six elementary schools. The high school is a newer facility and the district has broken ground on a new junior high school which replace one of the existing buildings.

The orchestra teachers in the district are Shane Schmeichel, Kristine Granas, and Beth Johnson. Schmeichel teaches at the high school, Granas teaches the 8th and 9th grades, and Johnson teaches the 7th grade. All of them work at the elementary schools.

It was exciting to hear the success that these three teachers have had in team teaching. Johnson does pull-out lessons during the 8th and 9th grade rehearsal, while Granas does pull-out lessons or sectionals during the 7th grade rehearsal. Johnson noted how having

another staff member in the rehearsal keeps the pace of rehearsal moving even if there is a broken string or late arrival.

The elementary program begins during the summer before the 6th grade year with the students getting three weeks of lessons in August. Once the school year begins, the elementary students receive one half-hour lesson and two hour-long large groups a week. The size of the larger group varies from 6 to 23 depending on the school. The elementary students give one big concert a year in May. The district uses the *Essential Elements Series* as its method book.

The junior high program has one orchestra for each grade. Current numbers in the junior high are: 25 in the 9th grade, 36 in the 8th grade, and 50 in the 7th grade. Since there are two junior highs in the district, the students work on the same repertoire and combine before the concert. Lessons take place during the 42 minute rehearsal period which takes place every day. The junior high gives two concerts per year. Current favorites of the students include: *Fandango*, *Helicon Overture*, *John Henry*, and *Suite for Strings* by Del Borgo.

The high school program meets every day for one period. There are no pull-out lessons at the high school although half of the students in the program are taking private lessons outside of the school day. There are students who also perform with either the Minnesota Youth Symphonies or the Greater Twin Cities Youth Symphonies. The high school gives three concerts a year and participates in the Minnesota State High School League's

solo and ensemble contests and festivals.

It sounds as if the district provided the string program with a large enough capital outlay budget to purchase instruments each year. The program owns many instruments which it rents to students. The orchestra staff feels fortunate that their repair budget is in line with the actual needs for its growing number of school-owned instruments. There is also a separate budget for music and supplies at each school.

The program is getting out into the community and playing at civic events. This past year, various ensembles have played at bank parties, Lions Club meetings, and pre-concert music before Community Theatre productions. So far the town's reaction to having a string program has been favorable though the staff still wants to make the string program more visible.

This is an exciting program that is still in its infancy. As traditions are developed and pride continued, the Forest Lake School District will appreciate having a string program in the community. As colleagues, let us offer assistance and encouragement to the new string programs across our state. There is not always success in numbers, but there is always strength.

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