

Program benefits children, teacher

'You gain a lot and learn a lot'

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Gazette Reporter

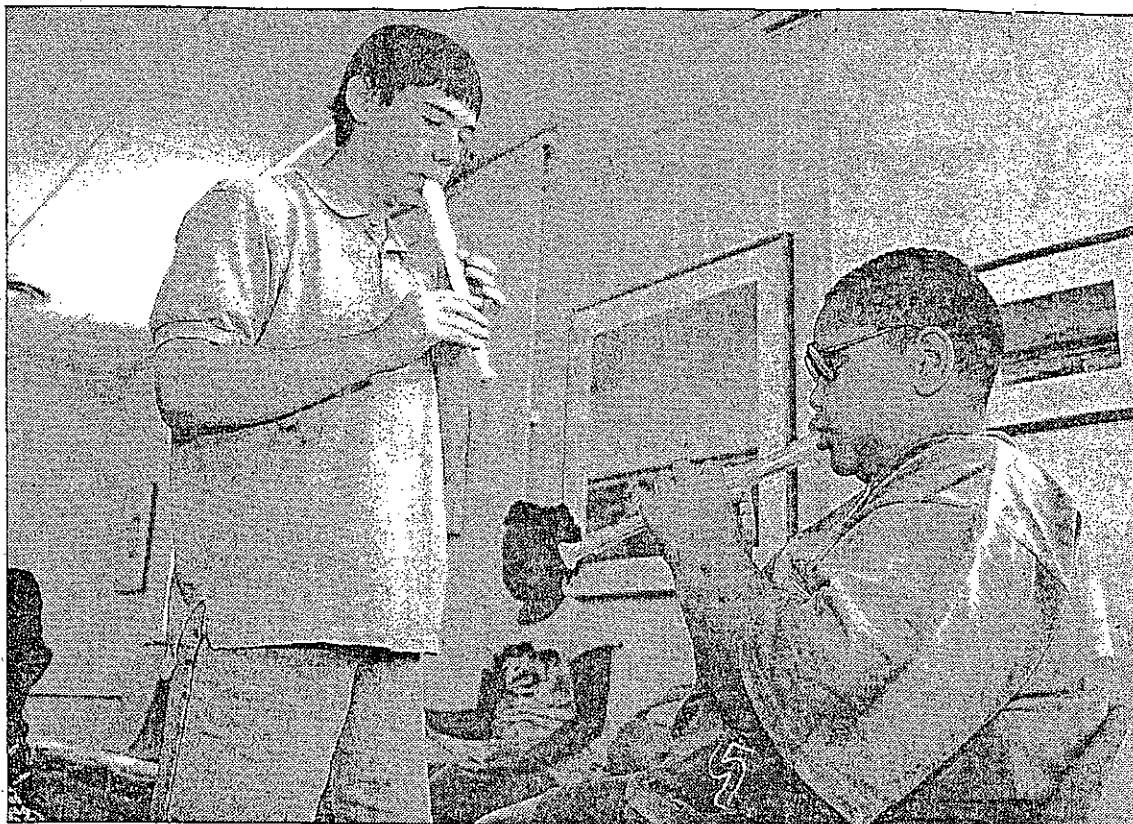
SCHENECTADY — The noise passersby may hear coming out of the Hamilton Hill Arts Center this summer is sure to be one of two things: the chatter of dozens of kids or the raw and mixed sounds of a few fledgling musicians.

With the opening of summer camp last week, energy fills the air at this neighborhood center on Schenectady Street. It has been virtually impossible for 17-year-old Sean Snapp to finish giving his hour-long music lessons without repeatedly telling his students not to talk or play while he's instructing.

But despite the many distractions, Snapp — head of the camp music program — is encouraged. The youngsters, he said, are really enthusiastic and they're learning.

"They are a handful," Snapp said Wednesday afternoon. "But it's fun to work with a lot of kids because each of them has problems with different things and each of them picks up certain things. . . . I really enjoy teaching and I think that when you teach, you gain a lot and learn a lot."

This is the second year Snapp has spent part of his summer at the Hamilton Hill Arts Center. A member of Congregation Gates of Heaven, he interns through his synagogue's Temple Community Service Corps. The program is financed by temple member contributions and offers high school and college youth summer jobs at agencies that help the community, especially the poor.



Sean Snapp, left, shows Chris Stewart, 9, how to play a note on the recorder during a music class at the Hamilton Hill Arts Center, part of the summer camp program.

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"This is the 32nd summer this program has been running," said David Coplon, who founded the program in 1971 and today co-directs it along with Ellen Blake.

"I read an article in The Jewish World about rabbinic students who worked in slums, like in Harlem, and other cities, and came up with the idea to propose this program," Coplon recalled. His son Jeff, a college student at the time, in 1970 challenged the congregation to demonstrate "a greater commitment to the moral and social agenda that has always defined a Jew."

The program has flourished every year since, said Coplon. This summer, interns are also working at Bethesda House, Daughters of Sarah, JOBS Etc., the Carver Community Center and Schenectady Inner City Ministry.

One of the basic tenets of Jewish teaching is the demand for justice and equality for every person, Coplon said. It is in that spirit that Temple Community Service Corps operates, he said.

As far as Snapp is concerned, the issue of equality encompasses music education. For almost all 20 students he is teaching this summer, this is their first experience learning music.

"I hope they gain some background in music and learn that music can be fun, and maybe they can try to pursue music in their schools now," he said. "At the

they can look back on and be happy about."

Chris Stewart, 9, is not only happy to learn an instrument, he is surprised. He didn't expect he would be any good at playing the recorder, a wind instrument with eight finger holes and fipple in a straight, vertical tube.

"I really wanted to play something, and I couldn't play the flute because it was too hard."

Now that Snapp has taught him a few notes on the recorder, Chris has been practicing with his foster dad, who plays the clarinet. And for the first time, Chris wants to play in his elementary school band.

"I won't have to worry about getting an instrument because I already have one," he said.

Snapp plays the flute and started last summer by offering flute lessons. But there were only three flutes available to teach eight children.

"It was very frustrating for them not to be able to practice," he said.

This year, hoping to help more of them, Snapp came up with the idea of teaching the recorder because it's an easy instrument for young people, and it's inexpensive. The temple and arts center split the \$80 cost of 20 new plastic recorders.

"It's good for the kids because, for six weeks, it's something they can really pick up on and learn a

they can take their recorders with them so it doesn't have to end."

Progress was slow but sure one morning this week as Snapp taught a group of six. After spending half the lesson reviewing the notes B, A and G, Snapp asked if anyone could play all three notes.

"Oh yes," 7-year-old Imaniyeh Stevens yelled out before demonstrating. Others chimed in.

A few minutes later, the group was able to play "Hot Cross Buns," a simple beginner's song, using those three notes.

Some tones were off, and a note or two was skipped, but they played together, and Snapp looked very proud.

"He's a very talented musician," said Miki Conn, executive director of the center. "He's quiet and serious and works really well with small groups of children."

Snapp plays in the Empire State Youth Orchestra as well as in the orchestra of the private Waldorf School of Saratoga Springs, where he will be a senior this fall.

He gives lessons to older students during the school year, but said he wanted to spend his summer at the art center to "help people and give back to the community."

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