

Families make music together at First Songs

By Karen Wehrstein

First Songs of Simcoe-Muskoka is about introducing kids up to age five to music.

But, says owner/teacher Kate Cavan, "It's as much a lesson for the parents as it is for the kids. The idea is the program is not supposed to be an isolated class once a week. The goal is that the parents themselves take away that music should ideally be part of everyday life at home."

With today's hi-tech music delivery, she says, people tend to consume music passively. She'd like to change that.

Each Saturday, Cavan teaches a 45-minute class of six to 12 youngsters plus their parents at the Bracebridge United Church, using the Music Together business model, for which she holds a franchise.

Classes feature a mix of movement and jam sessions with egg shakers, rhythm sticks, drums, resonator bells, both along with the course CD and freely improvised. The first class was on Jan. 7.

Each family gets two copies of a CD with a wide variety of music: not just "typical happy singy" kids' music, Cavan says, but songs in minor keys, unique rhythms and foreign languages, plus a songbook and interactive booklet/DVD set instructing parents.

Music engages more parts of the brain than almost any other activity says Cavan. It can be transformative too. "Parents are surprised by how their child can change," Cavan says. "A shy child all of a sudden will come out of her shell, whereas another that might be very kinesthetic or vocal might just sit still and listen."

In fact, parents who are insecure about their musical abilities can be helped too. "To your child, your voice is the most beautiful thing in the world," Cavan says.

Growing up in Ottawa, Cavan was always interested in singing, and took vocal training in high school, performing extensively. While completing an English degree, she volunteered in a Grade 1-2 classroom playing music with the students, and fell in love with it. She discovered the Music Together system in 2008, and after receiving her certification, moved to Bracebridge in October. She also offers music workshops for kids at birthday parties and other special events.

"Music is a common language we all share, and transcends barriers," she says. "It can create a really strong sense of community."



FAMILY FUN: Kate Cavan helps a young student create music at First Music class and jam session. Parents are encouraged to participate too.

Artist creates thousands of pieces as IKEA staff gift

By Don McCormick

"No. It can't be done!"

This was the response of well-known, Muskoka wood turner Don Thur when Kerri Molinaro, president of IKEA, asked him if he would accept a commission to make 4,200 bowls that would be given as gifts to every Ikea employee in Canada for Christmas 2011, one year hence.

Molinaro had seen a display of Thur's work at Red Leaves Resort and had come over to his studio south of Utterson to purchase a few pieces for herself when she made the proposal.

Thur, owner of Knots and Burls to Bowls, turns each bowl by hand and takes pride that each one is a unique piece of art.

Molinaro asked him to think about it before he gave a definite answer. Thur began to think that it might be possible if he could enlist some help. "As long as you physically handle every single piece and every one is done the way you would do every single one, we're not averse to you bringing in outside help," said Molinaro. Thur accepted the commission.

"She asked me to come up with a very unique style, so I did. I came up with a square bowl, seven inches, made of sugar maple, Canada's national tree from Ontario (preferably from Muskoka). The shape was what made it

unique as most wood turners shy away from square bowls," explains Thur.

It would be packaged in a veneer box made by Ekan Concepts of Huntsville because, "I thought it made an awesome presentation," he says.

Thur and Ekan made up a couple of prototypes of the

bowls and the boxes and sent them off to IKEA head office in Burlington. The response came back immediately, "Wow, that's it exactly."

This would be a new venture for Thur. Every piece would have to be the same so this necessitated a mass production process.

He put out feelers to other

wood turners in the province and found a fellow in Richmond Hill who had a couple of copy lathes. He made the rough copies and then shipped them to Thur who did the finishing in his own shop.

The bowls were then sent over to Ekan on Bickley Drive in Huntsville where

they were boxed in the specially made veneer boxes, packed into cartons and put into a storage unit Thur had rented for the project.

At the end of November, thirteen pallets of cartons going to twelve locations across Canada were shipped out by Manitoulin Transport. "In early December, on a giv-

en afternoon, every employee was called together and presented with one of my pieces from Muskoka as a Christmas gift," says Thur with more than a hint of pride.

This marks a watershed in Thur's business. If asked to do another project of this magnitude, "We're ready," says Thur.

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