

LIFE

Nurturing, encouraging Clallam's young voices

By Emily Matthiessen For the Sequim Gazette • August 28, 2024 1:30 am



Photo by Emily Matthiessen Volunteers organizing Clallam Children's Choir, from left, Dr. Susan Roe, Kathy Wraith and Joan Reeve Owens, with Sage Bateman (not pictured), anticipate bringing their musical expertise, experience and enthusiasm to local children in an attempt to prepare them for a lifetime of musical appreciation. The choir organization is a ministry of Trinity United Methodist Church for children of all or no religious background(s) and skill levels.

A team of seasoned vocalists and teachers have joined forces to create Clallam Children's Choir.

They offer vocal instruction and dinner for children in grades 1-7 at Trinity Methodist Church (TUMC), 100 S. Blake Ave., from 4:15-6 p.m. on Thursdays beginning Sept. 19, culminating in December performances.

The second season will run from January through May.

"The choir is a ministry of TUMC and designed to be a welcome place for people of all or no faiths," organizers said

Children from Clallam and Jefferson counties of all vocal ability and range of experience are encouraged to join.

Instruction will utilize classical technique to teach children to read, hear and sing music, proper posture and breathing and working as a team.

More than any skill level or prior knowledge, "we are looking for children who are motivated to learn," said Joan Reeve Owens, who will lead the rehearsals.

She said the songs will be a mixture of secular and sacred.

“There will be no homework,” Owens added.

Students should commit to being present for each of the 10 Thursdays, barring illness.

Owens said that the program will give the children of the peninsula “the gift to create music and enjoy music for a lifetime.”

One’s voice, she said, “is the only instrument we’re walking about with our whole life.”

Classical technique equips singers to be proficient in any musical genre they may choose in which to specialize in the future, she said.



Photo by Emily Matthiessen / From left, Dr. Susan Roe, Joan Reeve Owens and Kathy Wraith are three of the organizers of the upcoming Clallam Children’s Choir, which gives Clallam and Jefferson children in grades 1-7 the opportunity to learn to sing and perform in a choir of their peers.

The cost of the program for each child is \$60, with discounts for siblings. Scholarships are available for those who need them. Costs cover a choir shirt for performances, sheet music and musicianship supplies, with Trinity United (TUMC) covering additional expenses.

Dinner will be provided by church volunteers for the students and teachers. Owens said the dinners are intended to promote a sense of community.

Parents or guardians are welcome on Thursdays as volunteers after completing a background check and will also be served dinner. Examples of ways to help include assisting children, making dinner and clean-up.

The Clallam Children's Choir will have space on the TUMC website in the future, but organizers would greatly appreciate volunteer help to build their website.

Interested families should either call 360-808-2475 or email to jreeveowens@gmail.com with questions or to set up a private, informal audition for placement in the program.

About the organizers

Owens said she believes that almost anyone can learn to sing with motivation and proper teaching.

“When I got out of college, I actually had to re-learn how to sing because I was singing the wrong way,” Owens said. “And that’s part of what makes me feel like I can teach anybody how to sing.

“Vocal hygiene is a big deal, because if you learn to sing properly, then you don’t have vocal problems,” she explained.

Owens has more 40 years of experience working with all ages in choral music, and is retired from being a public schools music specialist, minister of worship and music, city arts administrator and conductor of the Intermediate Choir with Los Angeles Children's Chorus.

Children will be split into two groups for rehearsal. Owens will work with one group while Sage Bateman, who teaches General Music at Jefferson School in Port Angeles, will lead the musicianship class, wherein students play games and use instruments and sing together while learning to read music.



Photo courtesy of Sage Bateman / Sage Bateman will lead the Clallam Children's Choir musicianship class, where students play games and use instruments and sing together while learning to read music.

Owens said children who "can't match pitch yet" will attend vocal coaching in duos and trios during rehearsal time with Dr. Susan Roe.

Roe has 25 years of university teaching experience, 13 years of teaching elementary music, according to organizers, and has conducted choirs in churches and served as a vocal workshop clinician.

She also has extensive experience as a soprano soloist in opera, concerts, and recitals and is currently active in Peninsula Singers and the NorthWest Women's Chorale."

Roe said that in her teaching, "I give you the ingredients and the recipe and you bake the cake." She said that her exercises build strength, freedom and flexibility and that students learn how to match their breath to the requirements of each song.

Roe said that she gets a sense of how each child learns and tailors her teaching accordingly.

A fourth organizer, Kathy Wraith, will concentrate on administrative tasks and organization.

"I'm here in a support role," Wraith said.

Wraith recently retired after a lengthy career in human resources and financial management. She spent many years in the San Francisco Bay Area where she was a church choir soloist, musical theater performer, and member of several auditioned choral groups. Since moving to Sequim four years ago, she has sung with Peninsula Singers, Olympic Theater Arts Singers, Trinity Singers and the TUMC choir.

The organizers express their vision thus: “We believe children benefit greatly from learning to sing in a healthy way and by gaining the ability to read music. A choir is the perfect vehicle for childhood musical experiences, where the emphasis is on the basics of breathing, tone production, posture and functioning as a team. We hope that the establishment of a community children’s choir in Clallam County will be a gift to local children, giving them a means of self-expression, a sense of community and belonging, and joy in mastery. We believe that the vast majority of children can learn to sing well; that it is a skill learned in incremental steps like most sports.”

Said Owens, “Music teaches us at a level beyond words.”

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