

Bringing people together through music

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Special to the Monitor

Are you tone deaf? Even if you think you are, Greg Schneider is willing to bet money that you're not. He said 99 percent of the population can make music, at least recreationally. He should know. While teaching Music Together classes he's heard babies coo on important notes in the song. Even though they can't talk, children who are less than six months old can respond to the tones that they hear.

When people say that they're tone deaf, they're really just self-conscious about how their voice sounds. It's no wonder, since families rarely gather around the piano and make music together. Instead, people pop in a CD or listen to their iPods. Unfortunately, when parents are afraid to sing, their kids pick up on it.

Music Together makes it easy for parents to make music with their kids. It's an early childhood music program based on the belief that all children are musical. Just like with language, humans are most receptive to learning music between the ages of 0-5. If your child can sing a song while keeping the rhythm by the time they are 4 or 5, learning to sing or to play a musical instrument will come naturally.

Schneider sings and plays the guitar, but it's not a performance – he is making music with the kids and their parents. Kids sing along, play instruments, hit sticks together, wave multi-colored scarves, run around in a circle, and wiggle their fingers and bodies.

"It's amazing how little they think about it," said Schneider. "They don't have any inhibitions, any hang-ups. It's as natural as eating and sleeping."

It looks and feels like playing, but it's serious music education. They learn songs in different keys and in different meters. There are modal songs, songs in other languages and from other cultures. Each class has a hello-song, a goodbye song, a lullaby and a play along.

"I try not to do the songs just like on the CD. I don't want kids to think that it has to be just like the CD. I want to make it more active," said Schneider.

In the program, kids become more social, gain confidence, speak more and become more assertive. The classes have mixed ages, so the babies and toddlers can learn from the older kids and the older kids feel good about being role models.

After the class, kids gather around Schneider to look at his guitar. He lets them pluck and strum the strings and even make unusual noises while he answers all of their questions about the instrument.

Music Together is a nationwide program. Schneider teaches in Los Alamos. Classes will begin Sept. 8. Sign up by e-mailing Schneider at gas@swcp.com or calling 672-9554. For more information about Music Together, visit www.music-together.com.

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