



The St. Joseph Music Foundation

by Julie Summa

WANTED: Musical instruments that have been stuck in storage or tucked away in closets. Instruments that have spent more time gathering dust than making music can find new homes with children in Northwest Missouri through the help of the [St. Joseph Musicians Foundation](#).

In early 2007 a tragedy brought together a group of musicians in St. Joseph, Missouri, to assist one of their own. The St. Joseph Music Foundation was born and several months later a benefit concert took place to help pay for funeral expenses after a sudden death among one of the families that formed the core of the group.

Now the concert is over and the group has turned its attention to other projects. While local members of the foundation turn their attention to launching their Musical Minds program – giving instruments and instruction to children who can't afford it; there are foundation groups sprouting up in other parts of the country following St. Joseph's lead.

"Being a musician is more than a hobby it is a lifestyle, a culture," explains St. Joe native, and Portland, Oregon resident, Victor Perez. "Within the short time period I have been involved, I have seen how this foundation is self propagating. The professional-level resources that have been made available to members via the [foundation's] website are another reason as well. It isn't uncommon for musicians to look out for each other, but often it gets segregated. Through this foundation these walls are gone and it is open to all formats and all musicians."



Perez is making forming similar groups a father-daughter act. He is taking care of Portland as she is working on getting a music foundation together in Arizona.

"Two weeks after being informed of the benefit mentioned above, my daughter had a friend come home to find his instruments gone. She swung into action with the help of other musicians in the area and was able to generate enough cash within one week to replace his tools of the trade. When one sits back and looks at this they can not help but go, 'Wow! That is just cool.'"

Now the group is in search of musical instruments of all kinds to disperse to children who want to learn to play. The foundation is also prepared to help patrons sponsor a child in this endeavor through their website. The projected costs are: \$ 800.00 for a calendar year, \$535.00 for a school year, \$267.00 for a semester, and \$35.00 for two weeks.

The Foundation cites several studies to support its programs.

- In 1997, Dr. James Catterall of UCLA analyzed the school records of 25,000 students as they moved from grade 8 to grade 10. He found that students who studied music and the arts had higher grades, scored better on standardized tests, had better attendance records and were more active in community affairs than other students. He also found that students from poorer families who studied the arts improved overall school performance more rapidly than all other students.
- According to the journal *Neurological Research*, in March 1999 second graders from a low income school in Los Angeles were given eight months of piano keyboard training, as well as time playing with newly designed music software. The result? Those students taking the Stanford 9 Math Test went from scoring in the 30th to the 65th percentile. These second graders were performing sixth grade math. The critical point here is that the students were not taught math using music...they were taught music. It was the process of learning music that helped improve their math skills.
- Finally, from the journal *Nature* in 1996 researchers found that students of lower socioeconomic status who took music lessons in grades 8–12 increased their math scores significantly as compared to non-music students. But just as important, reading, history, geography and even social skills soared by 40%.



The foundation, whose website can be found at <http://www.stjosephmusicfoundation.org/about.html> is made up of musicians of all styles, as well as people who support the cause but don't make music for a living. The group's board of directors is made up of musicians Rick Allen, Michael Fuson, Mel Bay author Anthony Glise, Steve Grimes and Larry Schildtknecht. Along with members at large, the board meets once a week at a restaurant in town to hold business meetings and plan service projects.

Though they are based in St. Joseph, Missouri their membership is regional and they welcome all musicians and performing artists, sound techs, patrons, and interested parties from all over the Midwest.

"Our goals lie in creating an open forum with the venues we deal with," said founding member [Mike Fuson](#). "In addition, we work on issues that affect all of our businesses such as the promotion of St. Joseph entertainment as a whole, creating concerts and festivals and helping support and better those that already exist."

Membership is free to all who want to sign on. The website is extensive and not only carries membership information, but an extensive network of resources and professional information. If people wish, they may also form their own branch of the St. Joseph Music Foundation, under the umbrella of the original organization, Fuson said. A branch is already being formed in Lille, France by a woman who heard about the group through St. Joseph/Lille resident Anthony Glise. Other queries have popped up from people in Portland OR with Perez, and from musicians in Los Angeles and New York who've heard about the group through the professional grapevine.

Those interested in membership should use the contact information at the bottom of each webpage and get in touch with Mike Fuson. Another of the group's goals is to share information among members. To that end they present ongoing seminars on topics of interest to their members. Often the seminars are hosted at nearby Missouri Western State University where Glise directs the guitar studies program.

"One of the amazing things about the foundation is that it was founded by some of the most talented musicians in the region, such as Michael Fuson and Larry Schildknecht who have been active on the music scene for years," said Glise, who oversees the group's education committee when he isn't trekking between St. Joseph and France in pursuit of his musical career www.anthonylgise.com. "Because of the needs of both musicians and the community, the foundation has taken on a very positive, proactive personality in addressing critical needs in the arts community."



A major goal for the organization is to improve the music scene in St. Joseph to the mutual benefit of not only the musicians, but the business owners that benefit from live music as well.

"Kansas City now is what St. Joe was in the '80s," says Michael Fuson, vice-president and treasurer of the foundation and member of the local band, M82. Steve Grimes, recording secretary for the foundation, is also a member of M82 as well as an acoustic engineer. He was a sound man in St. Joe when live music was at its peak and has seen a noticeable change. "I made a living at it for several years," Grimes says. "(Now) pay has actually dropped."

The St. Joseph Music Foundation went from just a bunch of folks hanging around once a week, to a fully official 501© non-profit organization – so contributions are tax deductible. So far, membership consists of 63 musicians, venue owners, sound technicians and fans. Local bands that are members include Smilin' Jack, Fistful of Silence, Grass Widow and others.

The foundation's [website](#) also includes links to venue websites, want ads and a contact sheet for hotels, businesses and other establishments for use by musicians traveling through St. Joseph. As the membership grows, so will the website.

Glise, director of the foundation's education committee, thinks the group will provide a more direct link between the musicians and community members. "There's never been a concerted effort to get musicians not only linked to each other but also to the general public," Glise says. "Everyone in the industry knows each other, and the opportunity to bring that camaraderie under an umbrella of a foundation like this is very unusual. There's a core camaraderie of support among musicians here that's extremely rare anywhere. That is St. Joe."

The St. Joseph group is taking several causes to its heart. The next event takes place on July 5, 2008 from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. at the Civic Park when they will partner with the Federation of the Blind for the "Future Impact" project.

The purpose of this event is to help raise money for educational equipment for blind children. It will also help raise awareness that lack of essential materials or services locally sometimes necessitates a 500-mile trek to St. Louis to be sure the kids have what they need. The St. Joseph Music Foundation and The Federation of the Blind hope to facilitate acquisition of resources needed to assist these children right here in town and alleviate some of the burden born by them and their parents.

Throughout history, St. Joseph has always been a frontier in one form or another. It was the birthplace of the Pony Express, the original epistolary social network. Now it's the birthplace of a way for musicians- locally, nationally and internationally- to join together to form a support group for each other, and for their communities.

About the Author

Julie Summa, a professional writer, graduated from Northwest Missouri State University in 1995 with a degree in Communications. She is completing her second degree, this one at Missouri Western State University, with an eye to becoming a high school teacher. She works as a freelance photographer, writer and marketing consultant while attending school. Julie can be reached at j.a.summa@gmail.com. Samples of her photography can be seen at www.juliesumma.com.