

ABC Music Store and Academy

739 1st Street, Benicia, CA 707.746.7565

2156 1st Street, Livermore, CA 925.443.1244

<http://www.abcmusicbenicia.com/>

abcmusicstore@sbcglobal.net

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Stan Houston

Office: 707 746 7565

Couple empties cash register for kids' music programs

Benicia, Calif, October 19, 2011 –Earsplitting and explosive. These words come to mind in a classroom filled with first-time fourth and fifth grade band students banging and blowing on instruments. But trumpet blasts and cymbal clashes herald success to ABC Music Store and Academy owners Stan and Marianne Houston.

Since 2008, the couple has taken no money from their operations and instead, poured all of the profits, over \$50,000, into afterschool band programs in Benicia and Livermore, communities where their stores are located. With small businesses falling like dominoes in this brutal recession, why would the Houstons, by no means wealthy, put their hard-earned dollars into kids' music programs rather than into their own pockets?

When asked this question, Stan Houston replies, “We do what we do because we believe music education is not a frill; it’s crucial to childhood development – it builds self-esteem and keeps kids off the streets. We want to get the word out regarding its long-term benefits.”

In his Benicia store, as he completes a customer transaction, Houston talks band details on his cell with wife Marianne, Oncology Clinical Nurse Specialist at Contra Costa Regional Medical Center. On the counter sits a blue ceramic piggy bank. The sign reads: Save Benicia Bands. Marianne Houston is just leaving work and will drive 35 miles to Livermore’s Arroyo Seco Elementary where she will meet with parents and ABC’s Livermore band director.

The couple uses their dollars to plug the dike of a leaky educational system. Contra Costa County elementary schools continue to slash music programs. Antioch’s elementary band program was cut in September. Mt. Diablo Unified eliminated programs over the past two years. Other districts snip here and there.

The ABC owners support Livermore’s Arroyo Seco Elementary, Smith Elementary, and local Livermore charter schools. In Benicia, they work with elementary and middle school programs. To keep costs for parents to a minimum - around \$50 - they pay instructor salaries, provide

curriculum, discount equipment rentals, and promote and produce fundraisers. For any child who can't afford the program, it's free.

“It's been proven that music education prepares kids for academic and career success,” Houston continues. “Universities tell us they look for it as an extra-curricular activity because they understand its academic impact. “

Sound academic and workplace skills

Statistics indicate a strong correlation between music and academic success. A report by the Music Educators National Conference states SAT takers with music coursework or experience had verbal scores 57 points higher and math scores 41 points higher than their nonmusical counterparts. The very best engineers and technical designers in the Silicon Valley industry are, nearly without exception, practicing musicians says a report in The Center for Arts in Basic Curriculum, New York.

Houston says music education provides skills important to an evolving global workplace. “Music is the international language. All ethnic groups participate in band. As we move toward a more global workplace, that experience is important for kid's future careers.”

Pointing to his own 30 years of experience facilitating engineering contracts overseas, Houston says he used his music background to open doors. “All cultures have music in common,” he says. “You can talk about their composers, our composers, the greatest sax player. This relationship building is something very hard to do without having been exposed to the arts.”

A political hot potato

Beyond the funding challenges, the Houstons juggle a political hot potato. Teacher’s unions and school districts debate enrichment programs. They argue over staffing, overtime pay and more. “Antioch has no program because the District and teachers’ union reached an impasse. We understand the teacher’s union looking out for the teachers,” says Houston.” But who’s looking out for the kids? We work through the PTA’s to get the program to kids who need it.”

Creating team players and safer kids

In the Livermore classroom, band director Chelsea Chambers keeps all eyes forward. The children are focused and attentive, glancing occasionally at one another. Children learn to be team players in band, say the Houstons. But unlike athletics, no aggression, no special

physical ability is needed. “No one warms the bench; no one is the star. Everyone plays on the team at all times,” says Houston.

Times have changed, and their effort is worth it, say the couple. “In the 60’s and 70’s, it was pretty much assumed that if your kid was into playing music, he was into trouble. Today, if he is into music, you can assume that he isn’t.”



ABC Music Store and Academy owner Stan Houston gets a tip from student Jake Sackett on the drums. Jake, an ABC student and 5th grader at Mathew Turner Elementary, went from the afterschool program into the Benicia Middle School Jazz Band two years ahead of schedule.

Children study a new piece of music during the afterschool music enrichment program at Arroyo Seco Elementary in Livermore. Programs in Livermore directed by ABC Music Store and Academy support 50 children.



Front Row (left to right): Samantha McCutcheon, Serena Dolan

Back Row (left to right): Joseph Fields, Kayla Steinhorst, Joshua Lyons

Chelsea Chambers,
ABC's Livermore
band director, works
with Sarah Davisson
on snare drum
technique at the
Arroyo Seco
Elementary
afterschool
enrichment program.

