

Lake Coeur d'Alene

NEIGHBORS

July 2024



The Music Conservatory of Coeur d'Alene: Beyond Notes and Scales



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Cover Photo by Carly Agnew

A heartfelt community-based magazine exclusively serving the Coeur neighborhoods surrounding our beautiful North Idaho Lake.



By Carly Agnew
Photography By Carly Agnew &
the The Music Conservatory
of Coeur d'Alene

Music Conservatory of Coeur d'Alene

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Chris Fillios, President

Julia Petersen, Faculty Liaison

Zoe Ann Thruman, Board Director

Cynthia Newkirk, Executive Director

Walter Burns, Board Director

Jim Petersen, Treasurer (Not pictured on the cover)

Nestled in the heart of our hometown, the Music Conservatory of Coeur d'Alene not only offers a rich array of musical education and performance opportunities but also serves as a living testament to the region's vibrant history and commitment to preserving its heritage. Housed in the historic Hamilton House, a structure rich in architectural elegance, this two-story home was originally constructed in 1908 for Boyd Hamilton, the second Mayor of Coeur d'Alene, and his wife, Alta Browne, daughter of Spokane empire builder J.J. Browne. The home's design, created by Spokane architect George Keith, features a splendid wrap-around porch and a formal entry, exuding the charm and sophistication of the early 20th century.

Throughout its history, the Hamilton House has been a residence for several prominent public figures, including Idaho Supreme Court Judge W.F. McNaughton and Kootenai County Prosecutor William Hawkins. The building's large formal rooms and elegant design have always appealed to the artistic senses, making it an ideal home for musicians. The grand piano of vocalist Agnes Hawkins once graced the airy bay window, and her crystal-clear notes were a familiar sound to the neighborhood. Jazz musician William Hawkins and international piano jurist Dean Elder also found inspiration within its walls, practicing and performing in the house during their formative years.

The preservation of the Hamilton House is a story of community spirit and dedication. When plans surfaced to demolish the house in 2019, the community rallied together to preserve this architectural gem. Through the tireless efforts of individuals including Deborah Mitchell, Cindy Nunn, and Julienne Dance, the house was saved from destruction. Julienne's vision of repurposing the house into a music conservatory garnered widespread support, and two local businessmen, former Mayor Steve Widmyer and Don "Pepper" Smock, Owner and President of Windermere/Coeur d' Alene Realty, purchased the house in September 2020 turning a potential loss into a cultural triumph.



Pam Davies, Early Childhood Instructor



Julia Peteren, Music Therapist & Early Childhood Instructor

Chris Fillios, who joined the Music Conservatory after his term as a county commissioner ended in January 2023 and now serves as President, said, "Having helped save the Hamilton House for the Conservatory, and knowing that music saved my family from the Bolsheviks in 1922, I welcomed the opportunity to contribute to enhancing the cultural identity of Coeur d'Alene."

Cynthia Newkirk, the newly appointed Executive Director of the Conservatory, emphasized, "Music is a vital part of our community, bringing people together in ways that few other activities can. It's more than just entertainment; it's a powerful connector that crosses cultural, socio-economic, and generational lines."

Board Director Walter Burns, who is also with the Historic Preservation Commission, added, "This wonderful historic building was almost torn down, but today it still exists and is full of life and music. Watching young children discover music in this setting is both heartwarming and inspiring."

From early childhood music classes to private lessons, the Conservatory offers a comprehensive array of educational opportunities. Board Director Zoe Ann Thrumman said, "One of the best things about the Conservatory is that it has something for everyone in our community, from vocal and choral instruction, instrument classes and performance, music appreciation, composition, conducting, movement and rhythm for the little ones...or just coming to enjoy a concert on the lawn of the beautiful Hamilton House."

Led by highly accomplished and passionate music educators with diverse backgrounds and deep expertise— including local composer and celebrated violinist, Richard Altenbach, whose composition, "The Jester's Waltz" won second prize in the International Golden Key Piano Composition Competition in Vienna— the Conservatory provides a dynamic learning environment where every voice is heard. Through the faculty's collective expertise and unwavering commitment to student growth, they instill a sense of confidence and belonging in each aspiring musician.

Treasurer Jim Peterson summed up his love for the Conservatory in two words: "Children and Music." For young people, music education is incredibly beneficial, fostering creativity, discipline, and confidence. Programs like Mini Music Makers and Youth Choir exemplify how engaging with music can positively impact youth development. Its Introduction to Singing and Ukulele courses are fun, entry-level options to develop basic musical skills.



Emily Sana, Youth Choir Director and Voice Instructor

The Youth Choir of Coeur d'Alene, for tweens and teens, holds weekly rehearsals and ongoing auditions to ensure that new talent is continuously nurtured. This choir not only enhances vocal skills but also fosters a sense of community and teamwork among its young choristers.

Offering personalized instruction for students of all ages, private lessons are available across a wide array of instruments, including Piano, Strings, Woodwinds, Brass, Percussion, and Voice.

Julia Petersen, a music therapist and educator with a Human Services background in community advocacy for at-risk and underserved populations, explained the unique opportunity of having a Music Therapy program within a Conservatory setting. "When we apply an evidence-based music intervention to a music education model, we expand the scope of music education," she said.

Andrew Maurer, Piano Instructor

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Kent Kimball, Artistic Director and Conducting Instructor

Julia elaborated on the roots of Music Therapy, which is aimed at addressing specific treatment goals such as developing communication, social, and sensory skills. "When Music Therapy is combined with instrument instruction or participation in traditional music classes, the result is a complementary synthesis—learning music principles and elements through hands-on experience."

Beyond the classroom, the Music Conservatory actively engages with the community through concerts, recitals, and workshops showcasing the talents of its students and faculty. These events, open to the public, provide a platform for musicians of all ages to perform and gain valuable experience. Partnerships with other local arts and culture organizations and outreach programs further enhance its impact on the community.

Kent Kimball, Artistic Director of the Conservatory and a faculty member who teaches conducting, will once again lead the third annual performance of Handel's Messiah at the Schuler Performing Arts Center later this year.

Richard Altenbach, Senior Violin Instructor



Students performing at a recital



Looking ahead, the Conservatory aims to upgrade its facilities, sponsor more students from financially constrained families, and amplify community outreach efforts. By steadfastly adhering to its mission of safeguarding musical heritage while nurturing emerging talent, the Music Conservatory of Coeur d'Alene will persist in its role of enriching individual lives and fortifying the community's social fabric through the universal language of music.

As a non-profit 501(c)3 organization, the Music Conservatory is managed by a small team of staff and volunteers, and relies on the generosity of donors and community members to continue its operations. Learn how you can support its mission, view upcoming events and explore its programs by visiting cdaconservatory.org today.