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## **EIU Helping to Bring Music Program Back to Beecher City School**

*May-01-2007*

After 13 years without a music program, the Beecher City Junior/Senior High School will soon offer students a chance to join a choral ensemble, thanks to a unique collaboration with Eastern Illinois University.

Starting this fall, an EIU graduate student will lead Beecher City's new choral program, funded almost entirely through a tuition waiver from EIU and donations from the community.

Organizers hope to eventually expand the curriculum to include instrumental instruction at the grade school.

"This is a very exciting opportunity for everyone involved, especially the students in Beecher City," said Parker Melvin, chair of the EIU music department.

Steve Launius, who is in his first year as Beecher City's superintendent, calls the program a "tremendous learning opportunity."

"It's bringing music education to about 220 kids here at the junior/senior high school level, and that, to me, is part of the cornerstone of education," Launius said. "It's also an opportunity to interact with students from Eastern, which is a tremendous benefit to our students."

In addition to receiving the tuition waiver provided by EIU, the graduate student will be granted a monthly stipend thanks to donations from Dean Samuel and the Samuel Family Foundation and the Effingham County Community Foundation.

The Beecher City school board has agreed to pay half of the cost of a Yamaha Clavinova Digital Piano, purchased at a reduced rate from Samuel Music Co. of Effingham. Organizations and individuals in the community are raising funds to cover the other half of the \$5,200 instrument.

Dean Samuel, CEO of Samuel Music Co. and co-founder of the Samuel Family Foundation, said he strongly supports the cooperative effort.

"The Samuel family and everyone at Samuel Music firmly believes that music enriches peoples' lives, and we are fully committed to supporting communities in any way we can in order to get more people involved in music," Samuel said.

Joedy Hightower, executive director of the Effingham County Community Foundation, said the organization is happy to fulfill its purpose of directing resources to area projects that need them most.

"We are pleased to be part of this creative collaboration to bring music back to Beecher City," Hightower said.

Launius said the school district greatly appreciates the wide range of support it has received.

"It took everybody to make it all go together," Launius said. "That's what's made it all happen."

The graduate student, who will work under the supervision of EIU music department faculty, will be assisted by undergraduate music education students, who will receive invaluable hands-on training in a real-world teaching environment.

Such partnerships between universities and school districts are rare, Melvin said, adding that he only knows of one other Illinois university that has organized them.

While conceding that the project is a "huge undertaking," Melvin said he couldn't be happier to be a part of it.

"It's extremely rewarding," Melvin said. "The opportunity to help people in this way is the main reason I got into this career in the first place."

The Eastern Illinois University Choral Ensembles will perform a concert the morning of Friday, May 4, at the Beecher City Junior High and High School to introduce students to the program.

Applications for the graduate assistantship are still being accepted. Candidates will be interviewed by Beecher City school officials. For more information, contact the EIU Department of Music at 217-581-3010.