MUSIC, FRIENDSHIPS, AND CONTINUED LEARNING: THE NEW HORIZONS BAND EXPERIENCE

by White House of Music

Music Programs for Seniors & Retirees

Hello there! I'm Dianne Peterson, a White House of Music employee and New Horizons Band member. I'd like to share the story of how I became involved in our local New Horizons Band and some of the benefits it offers for senior citizen musicians of all skill levels.

My Story as a New Horizons Musician

My story is similar to that shared by many New Horizons Band members. I took band in high school, selling my tenor saxophone to a friend shortly after graduation. It's hard to believe that was nearly 50 years ago! Life got busy, I started a family, and music wasn't in the forefront anymore. When the time came for my kids to play an instrument, the tenor sax came back into my life again. I was fortunate enough to be able to buy my instrument back, handing it down to my son to play throughout his middle school and high school band careers.

Once my son graduated from high school, my tenor sax went back into storage once again, until one day I picked it back up to play around with it for a little bit. I haven't set it down since!

My love for music and the saxophone didn't just lead me to play again, it led me to a new career opportunity as an older adult. I soon discovered the New Horizons band program shortly after I was hired by White House of Music. While New Horizons is international in scale (there are 114 New Horizons Bands across the US alone!), the Southeast Wisconsin band operates out of our Waukesha retail store. With a qualified band director and educator like Dr. Craig Hurst at the helm, our band is home to over forty band members aged 50 and older.

One of my favorite things about the diverse participation is that you never know who you might run

across in the New Horizons Band. About a year ago a new trombone player joined our group, and after a brief conversation we discovered we grew up in the same community. Decades after we first played in band together in high school, we were once again reunited through New Horizons!

Getting Started in New Horizons

Getting started with New Horizons Band is very easy. While there are some costs to participate ($75 each trimester), the barriers to entry to the New Horizons Band are virtually non-existent. Musicians of all skill levels and experience are welcome, playing simply for the enjoyment of making Music for Life!

Some of our musicians began their New Horizons adventure with absolutely no background in music. Quite often these members start out by simply attending our weekly rehearsals with their rental instrument and watch the musicians play. After participating in a few private lessons, they begin to start playing some of the simpler portions of the selection, gradually contributing more and more with each passing rehearsal. After six months of lessons they can play right alongside the more experienced musicians!

For people who played music in school or earlier in life, the transition is even easier. I was amazed at how quickly I picked back up on my musical skills. It only took me three months to go from playing simple scales to getting up to speed with the rest of the group. At first I was worried about not being "good enough," but I quickly discovered that everyone involved was just looking to learn and have fun!

More Than Music: The New Horizons Social Experience

Rehearsals are just a small part of that fun of The New Horizon's Band. It's about relationship building as well. Typically running from 10:30 to noon, many members will meet up for lunch after rehearsals at a few of the local diners. We hold a variety of other social events, including voluntary off-site concerts at senior living centers or State Fair, an annual chili cook-off, and a number of band camps.

While some of these band camps are only a short drive away (our next weekend band camp will be up in Bailey's Harbor in Door County), others can involve travel across the country or even the other side of the world! A number of our members traveled to Australia for a band camp trip a few years before I came aboard. What an adventure that must have been!

The Benefits of Being a New Horizons Member

Being a New Horizons member has its perks. While many of us start playing with our old instruments from our school years, a number of our musicians have bought new instruments as we have progressed

in our skills. One fantastic money saving benefit is that the White House of Music offers members a free trimester of New Horizons membership with the purchase of each new instrument!

Participating in New Horizons Band offers plenty of positive health benefits as well. While I'm one of the younger members of the band, many of our members remain active well into their senior years! One of our older musicians immediately comes to mind. A gentleman in his eighties, he was having a great deal of difficulty coping with the onset of dementia. While his memory was diminishing and he struggled in other ways, the moment you put an instrument into his hands he could still play with the best of them!

Playing music through the New Horizons Band helps seniors keep their minds sharp, improving listening, learning, memory, and literacy skills. It also opens doors to all sorts of wonderful social experiences. Quite often the New Horizons Band serves as a springboard for participation in many other groups. Since I started playing in New Horizons, I've become involved in three other bands specializing in Glenn Miller-style swing music!

Interested in Signing up For New Horizons Band?

Looking for something to do now that the kids have moved out and you're finally ready for retirement? If you or someone you know might be interested in picking up an instrument and playing alongside others, we would love it if you stopped by and sat in on a rehearsal!

Additional details on the White House of Music New Horizons Band can be found on our website here.