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Music Educator Inspires With Acceptance Speech



Jeff Jolly, retired music educator from Belen, NM, was inducted into the 2009 Hall of Fame at the NM Music Educators Association annual conference in January at UNM. The following remarks are from the text of his acceptance speech. Although Jolly was speaking of his career as a music educator to an audience of his peers, his inspiring remarks are applicable to all of the visual and performing arts.

I believe, as all music educators do, that bringing music into people's lives is a powerful gift that gives us unique insight into our humanity. Some scientists believe humans became musical to attract a mate and propagate the species. Some think music developed as a survival strategy, giving people a reason to band together, forming common goals as a community, and providing for their defense.

But many have observed that making music has gone far beyond these simple, though important, functions. We know how effective the vehicle of music is for self-expression, and we've seen it unlock human potential. Recent brain studies show that music engages the brain on numerous levels simultaneously, more perhaps, than any other human activity.

It is common knowledge that music educators are currently engaged in a struggle to preserve music in the curriculum of many schools across this nation. I believe the human spirit requires more than the ability to develop technology or fuel an economy. These things are necessary, of course, but they tend to address our superficial needs more than they feed the soul. I believe we are musicians and music educators because we want to pass on to the next generation the richness and wisdom of our history and customs and expressions of feeling; we want to help young and old unlock the passion and power inside themselves.

So remember: when an administrator, politician, parent, student, colleague, or other community member conveys to you, in so many words or actions, that your work is insignificant, remember:

- We are the keepers of the connective tissue of community.
- We are the liberators of human potential and the human spirit.
- We are the conveyors of culture.
- We are the inspiration for millions of students who aspire to excellence, thirst for meaning, and dream of greatness.
- We are the builders of a legacy that consists of more than bragging rights over which country scores the highest on tests, or wins the most trophies, or has the biggest army. It's not about being better than someone else. It's about discovering what is best in ourselves, and bringing out the best in everyone around us.
- We are the messengers who bring to a fearful, war-torn, impoverished planet the message that there is also hope in the world, that in the song and the dance and the poetry and the painting and the storytelling we challenge our minds, we evoke deep emotion, we discover profound meaning, we celebrate love, and we learn what it means to be human.

This is no small thing we do and we should be proud of ourselves. These are uncertain times, but we are messengers of hope, we are reminders of what humans have in common, and we are teachers of the art of sharing and celebrating it.

At a time when educators, politicians, parents, and students are wringing their hands over the sad state of education, it is for us to stand and speak our love for our art, to rededicate ourselves to our calling, and to make music, confident that its power, passion, and clarity will reach beyond the fear and confusion that dominate the thinking of policy makers.

This is no small thing we do, and I am honored to share it with you.