

## EDUCATION



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The Blue Ridge School Chapter of Junior Appalachian Musicians celebrates the completion of its first year of classes with a grand finale concert on Monday, April 24 in the school's cafeteria.

# Blue Ridge JAM performs

Students from Blue Ridge School's Chapter of Junior Appalachian Musicians presented a concert of traditional folk music on the afternoon of April 24. It marked the final meeting of the school year for Blue Ridge JAM which began at the school in September 2016.

JAM is an after-school program that introduces music through small group instruction on instruments common to the Appalachian region. The program at Blue Ridge School has provided instruction in fiddle, banjo, guitar, mandolin, bass, autoharp and dulcimer. It has also included singing, traditional dance, games and story-telling.

There are currently 40 affiliate chapters of JAM in North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia. The first chapter was founded 17 years ago by Helen White, a guidance counselor at Sparta Elementary School in Alleghany County, who felt there was a need to preserve mountain culture as well as a need for positive activities for underserved youth. In 2007, the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation provided funding that led to the formation of Junior Appalachian Musicians, Inc. to promote a regional shared vision of JAM and provide resources, training materials and activities for young musicians. The headquarters for JAM, Inc. is now housed in Independence, Virginia.

Prior to 2016, students in the Cashiers area who wished to participate in JAM could travel to Cullowhee Valley School where Jackson County JAM has been meeting for six years. But with the new chapter housed at Blue Ridge School, students have been able to just stay at the school every Monday afternoon with no transportation worries.

Initially 32 students in grades 3-10 signed up for the program at Blue Ridge. Program Director Sarah Hall says there have been a few who have moved away or dropped out for sports, and some quit because of "sore fingers" but the overall retention rate has been good, with 24 students participating in the final week.

Only a few months into the program, a group of the JAM students played their instruments while riding in the back of a vintage pickup truck representing the Cashiers Historical Society in the Christmas parade and even won the "Cashiers Caroling" award.

Hall adds that community support for the program has been "amazing."

"Running the program isn't cheap," says Hall. "We needed funds to purchase instruments, strings, straps, tuners, capos, rosin and refreshments. Lots of people got

instruments out of their closets and attics and donated them, but many of these instruments needed repairs. We also pay stipends to teachers. Even though we charged tuition, we did not turn away any student who could not pay. Much of the funding that we received went to scholarships and financial aid."

The Church of the Good Shepherd was first to provide funds last summer; that was the catalyst needed to get the program off the ground. Other local organizations that made JAM possible include the Blue Ridge School Educational Foundation, Cashiers United Methodist Church, Cullasaja Women's Outreach, Cedar Creek Racquet Club and Glenville Community Development Club. Additionally, there are numerous individuals in the Cashiers community who have made generous financial contributions to JAM and purchased instruments for students to use.

Additional guidance for the program is provided by an advisory council. The members are Teri Walawender, Wanda Crisp, Tom and Wendy Dowden, Billy Rintz, David Wansley, Jennifer McKee, Jarrett Davis and Debra Lassiter.

McKee, Davis and Lassiter also serve as volunteer JAM teachers.

"I have been quite impressed with the enthusiasm and enjoyment shown by the JAM students, says Lassiter. "It's a fun program which introduces the children to, not only how to play an instrument, but storytelling, traditional dance, and performances by musicians that they can actually join in playing with. It's a great experience for these kids and I'm proud to be assisting in the fiddle class and to be serving on the Blue Ridge chapter Advisory Board."

Faculty members include three teachers who have previously served as JAM instructors at Cullowhee Valley: Carter Geigerich, Dusk Weaver, Betty Brown and Grace Morris. Other teachers this past year were musicians John Duncan, Alex Canup and Jeff Denton.

Even though Blue Ridge JAM has presented its final concert for the school year, the music isn't over. Many of the students will be participating in a JAM day camp at Western Carolina University on May 13 along with other JAM kids from throughout the region.

And Blue Ridge JAM will be back this fall.

For information, contact music teacher Sarah Hall at shall@jcpmail.org or call 828-743-2646.



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Blue Ridge School banjo pickers include Liberty Crawford, left, and Instructor Alex Canup.



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Blue Ridge School fiddle players include, from left, Kaitlyn Rodriguez, Isabelle Orr, James Madden and Instructor Grace Morris.