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Sharing the Gifts of Music

THANKS TO ONE WOMAN'S INITIATIVE, TODAY'S YOUTH ARE
LEARNING TO LOVE CLASSICAL MUSIC.

BY JOHN MARINI

A changed life looking to change lives is a good description of Mary Gossett and her work in the DeLand neighborhood of Spring Hill. Devoting her time and energy to the Chisholm Center Community Choir, she is sharing the life-changing experience she received through classical music with local kids.

"I learned there are a lot of young kids, especially in this area of DeLand, that have not been exposed to the classical arts," Gossett says. "They don't have the opportunity to sing classically or experience who Mozart is or who Beethoven is. That is something I was raised on and I realized I had the responsibility to share this information that changed my life. I thought it may change their lives as much as it changed mine."

A voice performance major at Stetson University in DeLand, Gossett found help in seeing her dream become a reality through a \$1,000 gift from the Jimmy & Rosalynn Carter Partnership Foundation. She was awarded a CASE (Carter Academic Service Entrepreneur) grant last fall for her proposed program, which incorporates academic learning and community engagement. The choir was formed in early spring.

"It's an unbelievable experience to teach classical music to others, especially to youth that have not been exposed to it," Gossett says excitedly. "At first they think it's kind of dorky or nerdy and that it's out of their realm, but as they get used to it, it's really cool to see them come alive."

The choir is comprised of middle and high school students, and Gossett does most of the behind-the-scenes organizational work. She utilizes help from her



KIDS IN THE CHISHOLM CENTER COMMUNITY CHOIR learn to appreciate classical music by students at Stetson University, who teach them how to read music and sing.

COURTESY CHISHOLM CENTER COMMUNITY CHOIR

fellow music majors when it comes time for rehearsals. The other Stetson students help teach the kids how to read music and sing, and they also offer one-on-one voice lessons.

"I've seen a lot of students come in with the outlook that pop music or what they sing in church is the only kind of music, or the right kind of music," she says. "I've seen their minds open up and expand when I teach them there's a diverse area of music for them to explore. I've been able to see them learn and eventually come to accept music they once thought was just too far out of their reach."

Gossett graduates from Stetson in

December and would like to see the program she started continue. "I hope Stetson will adopt it because it provides conducting and teaching experience for Stetson students, as well as an opportunity for youth in the community for years to come," she says. "I believe the classical arts can give people something they never experienced before. Nothing has been able to touch me the way classical music has; it's something that's almost spiritual to me." **oam**

John Marini lives in Oviedo with his wife, Tracy, and their two children. He has 19 years' experience in corporate communications and specializes in advertising copywriting.