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For Immediate Release <<

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It All Began with Dulcimers

Pickens-Ambler Elementary School is one of the newest additions to the Young Appalachian Musician program and Janet Hardin is excited about their involvement. In January 2008, Betty McDaniel, YAM Executive Director, began the program to teach children to play traditional string instruments by ear and it quickly became popular throughout the Pickens community. “I knew Janet was already teaching her students to play the dulcimer and asked if she would be interested in becoming involved with YAM,” McDaniel said. “Ambler seemed to be a good fit for the program.”

Hardin, who heads the music program at Ambler, introduced her fifth graders to the traditional dulcimer several years ago. Last year she began working on National Teacher Certification through the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and chose her dulcimer unit to highlight. “I had a small, but challenging, group of fifth graders who refused to play together,” Hardin said. “Each student seemed to want to finish before the others—not the cooperative spirit that is necessary in ensemble playing.” So she sought a performance venue to encourage them to work together. “I contacted Betty about jamming with her YAMs and that lit a fire under my students. By springtime we were ready to meet with Betty’s group for a fun afternoon. Although there were only a couple songs they could play together the kids had a great time,” Hardin said. “I got to see Betty’s YAM program up close and I thought, ‘We have got to do this!’ ”

Through the fundraising efforts of POSAM, instruments were provided for 40 students who are now learning to play banjo, mandolin, fiddle, and guitar. “We were lucky to get 4 experienced instructors for our students; Lewis Crowe, Steve McGaha, Andrew Farmer, and Herman Towles,” Hardin said.

“I am starting to see the benefits of YAM in my music classes already. Students are eager to share connections with their YAM studies in class,” said Hardin. “Our students are not intimidated by physical handicaps as two of our banjo players are hearing impaired. Perhaps they are inspired by instructor Lewis Crowe, who is just getting used to his new implants.”

Crowe, an exceptionally gifted musician, has been hearing impaired for more than thirty years and recently received a cochlear implant to allow him to actually hear the music he plays. “I worked with many bands using a stand up monitor to get by,” Crowe said. “In 1978, when I could no longer hear the high notes of the fiddle, I switched to the mandolin which has frets.” It will take about six months for Crowe’s implant to function clearly. “The YAM students at Ambler all understand,” Crowe said. “I receive so much pleasure

by taking a child who may have never even held an instrument and see after a few weeks the joy they receive by being able to play a simple tune.”

Longtime local musician Steve McGaha is also a YAM instructor teaching banjo, guitar, and mandolin at several different schools. McGaha got his first guitar at the age of 12 and began playing on stage in high school. Some may remember him playing with Viper, a local ‘rock and roll’ group, in the ‘70’s and more recently an ‘old time’ music group known as Weasel Creek String Band. McGaha is excited about the YAM program. “I just quit my job to devote time to teaching,” McGaha said.

Teaching kids provides a satisfying experience and a busy schedule but both these YAM instructors also offer private lessons for anyone interested in learning to play.

A Kid Jam and fundraising dinner is scheduled for February 16, 2010 at Ambler Elementary. Details will be announced later but all YAM students will be invited to participate in the jam session.

Young Appalachian Musicians are sponsored by Preserving Our Southern Appalachian Music, Inc. (POSAM) a charitable non-profit organization and all contributions are tax deductible. Donations may be made to: YAM Program, c/o Betty McDaniel, 792 Holly Springs School Road, Pickens, SC 29671. For further information call 864.878.4257 or 864.878.1177 or e-mail POSAM_Info@yahoo.com.

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YAM instructor Steve McGaha demonstrates a strumming technique to banjo student Zach Rainey