

## Vail Valley kids life skills through piano lessons

Vail Valley pianist Tony Gulizia teaches more than music to Meadow Mountain fifth-graders  
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Fifth grader Jake Borel concentrates as he counts out a piano piece during Tony Gulizia's piano class thursday at Meadow Mountain Elementary in Eagle-Vail, Colorado  
*Dominique Taylor/Vail Daily*

VAIL VALLEY, Colorado — Fifth-grader Carla Fuentes scarfed down her lunch in about five minutes with about 15 of her Vail Valley, Colorado classmates in order to fit in enough time to learn how to play the piano — it was the small sacrifice she made in the name of music.

Carla now knows what the twins and triplets are on a piano. She even knows how to place her fingers on the keys and play a few notes.

The Meadow Mountain Elementary students signed up for some piano instruction during lunchtime, taught by Tony Gulizia, a well-known local pianist. The children gave up several days of lunch and playtime in order to learn how to make some music. Instead of running around outside with their friends, they were inside watching, concentrating and listening.

Holly Tranter, the school's music teacher, wanted to give her students "a little extra enrichment." With help from Bravo Vail Valley Music Festival and the Youth Foundation, Tranter had what she needed to put together a six-class test program — a qualified pianist to teach the class and enough keyboards to go around.

She said she couldn't believe her ears at the end of the 30-minute sessions.

"At the end of the day I go, 'how did they just learn that in 30 minutes,'" Tranter said. "Tony is so great with them."

Gulizia plays the piano every night at Beaver Creek's Grouse Mountain Grill. He also plays various events throughout the valley and gives private lessons. He's worked with local children before — he's not teaching them how to play entire symphonies, but they're learning a lot more than just how to play some notes on the piano, he said.

"Think," he shouts to the classroom. "We can't be perfect if we don't start on the right note."

The children learn how to listen, focus and play as one. They learn the value of teamwork and they learn to be patient by not jumping ahead of the tempo.

"He makes it fun when he teaches," said Abby Davidson, one of Tranter's students who signed up for Gulizia's classes.

The students smile as they watch a television screen showing the placement of Gulizia's hands on the piano. Some look frustrated when they don't get the right note, but everyone looks eager to keep trying. When they play segments of music together and hear the sounds of their progress, the entire room gets overjoyed.

"I love learning something new that you've never really tried before," Abby said.

Griften Moller is just happy to have a little escape — if he doesn't want to play with his brothers at home he can wander off to practice the piano in peace.

"It's something to do," he said.

Gulizia is hoping the new-found musical skills — Tranter said none of the students had ever played a piano or keyboard before — will encourage them to take up some form of music as either a hobby or a career.

"Maybe it inspires them in middle school to pick up a band instrument," he said.

Tranter is just happy that her students get to learn from a professional, and they also see how practice and hard work can pay off, she said.

"They see (Tony) around town — they can see someone has made a life of (playing music)," she said.

"They're giving up lunch and recess for this."

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