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# NKU's music prep honored

BY HOWARD MCEWEN | ENQUIRER CONTRIBUTOR

**HIGHLAND HEIGHTS** - Northern Kentucky University's music preparatory department has been racking up awards recently.

In March, the Northern Kentucky Youth Sinfonia won a gold medal and the Northern Kentucky Youth Orchestra won a silver medal at the Heritage Festival in Chicago. This month, the Northern Kentucky Children's Ensemble Concert Choir won second place at the Heritage Festival in Nashville.

Toni Sheffer, director of the music preparatory department, said anyone is allowed to take classes with them.

ADVERTISEMENT "We have had 3-year-olds learning Suzuki violin and Orff music classes to an 81-year-old gentleman taking violin lessons," Sheffer said.

"We offer quality musical training to any and all ages of the community without credit. Anyone can register quite easily and study music whether it be to prepare for singing a solo at their local church, to prepare for college as a music major or just for their own enjoyment."

This is Nathan Hilvert's second year with the program.

"It's really been a good experience and a lot of fun," said Hilvert. "There's a lot of great kids in the group and we've had a lot of great performances."

Hilvert, 16, of Burlington, began playing the violin at 6. He said he's always been surrounded by classical music and the competition offers a sense of validation.

"It's just a lot of fun to have all your work pay off and really judge how well your orchestra is doing or isn't doing," he said.

Ellen Stephens is the director of the department's string program and conducts the Sinfonia. For her, the department serves two functions.

"On the university level, it's a way to reach out to the community," Stephens said. "We're a benefit for the university because we serve as an advertisement for them. We get their name out there. We make NKU familiar and comfortable."

The music preparatory department, which began in 1993 with 129 students, now has an enrollment of 1,100 per year.

However, to join a group, students must pass an audition.

"They are string orchestra only: violin, viola, cello and bass," said Sheffer. "They have to be proficient as a soloist and orchestral member to handle their part within the orchestra. Since Northern Kentucky never has housed any string programs in the schools until recently, they have had to take the task upon themselves for their own private training with the help of the training we have provided through the programs offered at NKU."

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