



# PRESENTS THE TEACHER OF THE MONTH



## Megan Shults Music teacher introduces harmony in students' school experience

Lyles Middle School music teacher Megan Shults says she always knew she would be a music teacher. "My family was education-based," Ms. Shults says. "My mom is a junior-high counselor in Oklahoma, a career she's had for 37 years."

The music students at Lyles Middle School are grateful that Ms. Shults found her way to their school. In her nine years at the school, enrollment in the choir program has more than tripled, from around 80 students originally to today's roster of about 260.

"Our choir program has a reputation for excellence," Ms. Shults says. "The students know they're going to work hard, but they also know there's a trade-off."

That trade-off comes in the form of fun extracurricular activities the kids anticipate as soon as school starts. "Every year we have a Christmas party at the Galleria, and I take all the kids ice skating. It's their reward for all their hard work," Ms. Shults says. "The kids start asking me when we're going to the Galleria on the first day of school."

That enthusiasm isn't limited to the parties and extra fun Ms. Shults plans for the kids. She says they're equally excited about performing and participating in judged competitions.

"Every October, seventh and eighth graders can participate in a solo contest," she says. "They sing in front of judges and are graded. We usually have 60 or 70 students compete in that."

She adds that they must motivate themselves to participate in a contest such as this, because they have to practice for it on their own time.

"We usually have four or five who are nominated as outstanding soloists. That shows they have gone above and beyond performing the music and the words beautifully, and have exhibited exceptional musicality."

Ms. Shults's pride in her students doesn't stop with their extracurricular accomplishments.

"Our choirs really attract a great group of well-rounded kids," she says. "We've got football players, cheerleaders, kids from every walk of life get involved with choir at Lyles, it seems."

One reason for the widespread involvement may

be the wide range of options available to the students.

"We have three sixth-grade choirs, with about 35 kids in each, a seventh and eighth grade A Capella Choir, a Treble Choir and a Concert Ladies Choir for seventh and eighth grade girls," she says. "Next year we're planning another Boys Choir because the interest level has gone up so much."

The philosophy at Lyles allows for this growing level of interest, Ms. Shults says.

"We try not to make the students have to choose from among their electives, but participate in as many as they want to," she says. "We want to let them sample everything at this age, since once they get to high school, they'll really have to start making some tough choices."

Undoubtedly, Ms. Shults's enthusiasm for her subject — as well as her students — helped Lyles's choir program expand so dramatically, says Janice Howard, Lyles Middle School principal.

"Seeing what she has done with the program, it's just great," Ms. Howard says. "The students do exceptionally well in their programs at school and when they perform locally. It's great to see how well disciplined the students are, how poised and professional."

The principal says it's easy to sing the praises of the talented teacher.

"It's all superlatives: she's exemplary, student oriented, and helps them look ahead in their academic careers."

Ms. Howard says suggesting students pursue choir as a way to help fund their college educations is an important part of Ms. Shults's "continuing education" philosophy. "She gives them a framework at a very early age for considering how they can go forward. She is really an inspiration to the students, encouraging them to work hard and do well."

Proof of her inspiration can be found at the high school level, Ms. Howard says. "So many choir students from Lyles go on to participate in the choir program at Lakeview Centennial High School," she says. "When they see Ms. Shults at one of their programs, they just light up. It's like a big family."



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