

The History of Save Our Kids Music

In 1991, the entire PVSD music education program of more than 800 students was threatened with a proposition that cut \$1.8 million from the district. At the time, PVSD decided that they could no longer pay the \$59,000 required to maintain the music program, which had already been struggling. Consequently, parents were upset that their kids would no longer have the ability to play their instruments at school, to perform for the community, and to meet friends through the music program. Shortly after, however, a few parents decided that they were not going to sit back and watch the music program disappear from the schools.

Later that year in May, Reese Copsey, one of the parents of the program, was standing outside of Los Altos Middle School on the night of their last concert, passing out fliers stating why the music program had to be preserved. As fate would have it, another parent, Betty Weyek, was also passing out fliers for the same purpose of saving the music program. When they met this night, it was the event that would soon shape music education in Camarillo for the next 30 years.

Soon enough, the parents began holding meetings once a week to discuss how to ensure that the music program stayed alive. In June of 1991, Copsey and another parent, Annette Okamura – who was also a long-time advocator for the arts in Camarillo – became the two chairmen of this group and gave it the name, “Save Our Kids’ Music.” After presenting a petition signed by 241 students and 279 parents to the school board, the parents eventually came up with an idea to keep the band program alive: SOKM would run a fundraising campaign to collect money that they would then donate to the school district to cover the costs of the program. Essentially, SOKM would pay for the music program through fundraising.

Early in 1992, the music program restarted and consisted of a before school advanced group that met at Los Primeros and a twice-a-week elementary school program taught by Dan Rhymes and a few other helpers. Although there were only a few programs at this time, the amount of work that went into running them is astounding. At Los Primeros, the parents

would drop off their kids twice a week early before school and pick them up an hour later to drive them to their actual school. Then, the music teachers at Los Primeros would drive to the elementary schools to take kids out in a small time slot during lunch in order to play music. It wasn't easy, but that didn't stop the dedicated teachers, students, and parents from making it work.

In addition to these efforts, the most challenging aspect of SOKM's work was the fundraising to pay for music. During March of 1992, SOKM hosted a steel drum concert for the several hundred audience members in the Las Colinas gym to raise funds. Two months later, more than 500 music students from every PVSD school performed at Las Colinas to raise funds for the music program just so they could have at least one more year of guaranteed music. Even after these fundraising efforts, SOKM was still about \$4,000 short of paying the district. To compensate, they held a ginormous garage sale that filled up the entire Los Primeros gym with donated items, and sold all of it. Oh, and they did this again the next year as well.

Over the years, SOKM has continued to grow and integrate music into the Pleasant Valley School District in various ways. In 2008, after 8 years of teaching before school classes at Monte Vista, Reese Copsey became a music teacher at Las Colinas, beginning the music program there. His daughter, Tricia Copsey, began working at Monte Vista the same year. The next year, SOKM paid for beginning band at both schools so the program could expand. Around the same time, Karen Gatchel, who's now the head of SOKM, began a separate program called the "Youth Arts Academy." This program – funded by SOKM – includes many after school programs today including string orchestra, chorus, jazz big band, and more. Today, SOKM's goal remains to maintain and expand the music programs in Camarillo, along with continuing to work with the school district to get them to fund music more.

I chose to do my research on Save Our Kids Music because of the massive impact the program has had on my life. Back in 4th grade, I began playing saxophone in the after school beginning band and have since continued to play music to this very day, although now I play percussion. SOKM has benefited my life so much, from all the playing experiences I had in middle school to all the friends I met that I still know today. Most of all, it helped me realize

my love for music and the amazing relationships that can come out of it. If it weren't for the tireless efforts of parents, teachers, and students back in the early 90s, there would've been a huge void not just within the schools, but in Camarillo.

Throughout the 30 years of its existence, not only has SOKM saved the kids music, they've saved the countless memories kids will soon look back on, they've saved the creative expression of playing an instrument, and they've saved a vital part of the community that will continue to bring us together as long as the music keeps playing.