Students get their voices back
Cabrillo students teach choir at Valencia Elementary School

By TODD GUILD
OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

Students at Valencia Elementary School are singing for the first time in 12 years. On Tuesday morning, as hundreds of family members watched, the school's new informal choir classes performed several songs including holiday classics, a Zambian folk song and a classic rock song. The return of choir lessons at the school comes thanks to the efforts of newly elected Pajaro Valley Unified School District trustee Kim DeSerpa, who said she made it one of her missions to bring music back to the classroom.

"It has been my goal since I started with the school seven years ago," DeSerpa said.

Music, along with sports, art and many other programs and services, has been slashed from districts around the U.S. as the economy has tanked and education leaders have focused on mandated curriculum such as math and English.

See MUSIC, page A3

MUSIC
From page A1

In many districts, those programs have returned only as parents raised the funds themselves.

In the intervening years since music fell by the wayside, DeSerpa said the school had to focus on more pressing needs, such as getting computers and playground equipment.

"Then, I set my sights on getting music back in the classroom," she said.

DeSerpa recruited Cabrillo College student Uriah Mache, who was teaching piano lessons to her children.

Mache, 20, said he was excited about the thought of teaching choir.

"I thought it would be great, but it was overwhelming," he said.

And so Mache asked two friends, James Lesui and Jorge Torrez, both Cabrillo College music majors, to help him.

"Within a few weeks, we had our first lesson, and it's been going strong since then," Mache said of the class, which began in October.

For their efforts, the Cabrillo students receive a small stipend funded by Valencia's Home and School Club.

Mache said he remembers singing with the school's choir program when he was in kindergarten at Valencia.

"That's about all I remember about it," he said.

Mache called the absence of music in schools a "tragedy."

"It needs to change," he said.

"Music should be part of the standard curriculum."

Tuesday's family concert marked the end of the semester, but the three plan to be back in January when classes resume.

During the one-hour lesson, students are taught basic voice techniques, rhythm, pitch and performance etiquette. Torrez, 22, said working with the students was a challenge at first.

"This school hasn't had music for 12 years, we had to start from scratch," he said.

Next year, Torrez said, they will begin to work on music the...