

Friday, February 19, 2016

ENTERTAINMENT LOCAL

Barrie piano teacher raising the bar



By [Susan Doolan](#), Special to QMI Agency

Wednesday, February 17, 2016 6:18:39 EST PM



Nena LaMarre's enthusiasm for teaching piano is just as strong today as it was 45 years ago when she began. Now, she will be training teachers, one of only a few teacher-trainers accepted by the Suzuki Association of the Americas.
Brian Hatton Photo

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Now, she will be training teachers, one of only a few teacher-trainers accepted by the Suzuki Association of the Americas.

"I'm very excited; there is a real need," said LaMarre, who has had people interested in becoming a piano teacher of the Suzuki method and now she can say yes.

There are only five teacher-trainers in Canada and only two are actively teaching.

It is a process that began, for LaMarre, at the end of December 2009. That is when she submitted the paper and video portion of the application. She received news of her acceptance just before the end of last year.

"(It) made for a very happy Christmas," said LaMarre, adding the final part of her training will take place this summer when she shadows a teacher-trainer who is teaching book one in the process of becoming a teacher-trainer.

She did workshops, extended courses and numerous units/books, sometimes travelling one to two days at a time to Guelph where Gail Lange, reputed to be the top teacher-trainer in Canada, was located. Every summer she would take a week for further study.

Before embarking on the process, teachers are required to be accomplished performers and be educated musically. She was also required to submit a video of one of her performances as well as videos of her students, representative of every Suzuki level, as well as another video of showing her teaching a group lesson.

Becoming a teacher-trainer, however, does not mean the end of her Barrie piano studio.

"I consider it an honour and privilege to work with these children and their families," she said. "Teaching student is my priority, my life. I can't ever see myself retiring, as long as I have my health."

In addition to guest teaching at Concordia and Wilfrid Laurier universities and in numerous cities, LaMarre is the chairwoman of the Suzuki Association of Ontario. There are approximately 200 members who teach a variety of instruments. The umbrella organization, the Suzuki Association of the Americas, has 8,000 members and is based in Colorado. It is one of five global regions that are licensed by the International Suzuki Association.

The Suzuki method was developed by a Japanese musician, philosopher and educator Dr. Shinichi Suzuki (1898-1998). He believed that all children had the ability to learn and excel in the right environment. He applied the basics of how children learn to speak to music.

"We believe in ability development. Every child can be trained to play beautifully," LaMarre said.

She started out teaching Royal Conservatory of Music and became hooked on Suzuki when she saw what it did for her child. Her daughter, Janice, had been asking to play the violin from the age of two, but she wasn't able to find a teacher for her until she turned four. That teacher taught the Suzuki method.

"I watched her and became convinced this is the way to teach young children," said LaMarre, who has been teaching Suzuki for the past 24 years. "Janice was not particularly quick in her studies, but she loved it."

Janice switched to viola a few years later and continued her studies, had her debut concert at New York's Carnegie Hall and has her doctorate.

LaMarre started out, as a child, playing another instrument: the accordion. It was her first love and she was good at it, too. In her teens, she was first runner-up at the North American Accordion Championships in Chicago. At the age of eight or nine, she added piano because her mother felt it might be a better physical fit for her tiny daughter than carrying such a big instrument.

Still, LaMarre kept it up even as she acquired a music degree in piano performance and her ARCT in piano.

For more on the Suzuki method and LaMarre's piano studio, see www.thesuzukipianostudio.com.