



A M A R I L L O C O L L E G E

Suzuki Program

Since 1977, the Amarillo College Suzuki Program has offered highly qualified and trained Suzuki instructors to support and train growing talent in all students.

Founded by Suzanne Grooms and Helen Gerald over 35 years ago, the AC Suzuki Program owes its tradition of excellence to these women, who led and taught in the program throughout their lives, and to Beverly de la Bretonne, whose 30+ years as program director continues to set a high standard. Many current teachers are alumnae, and many current students are children of alumni.

What started with two teachers and a few dozen very young violin students has grown to approximately 120 violin, viola, cello, guitar and flute students, aged 3-17, with well-trained Suzuki private-lesson teachers and additional supplemental weekly group teachers. Weekly orchestras and ensembles, pre-school Orff classes, monthly Play-ins, solo & group recitals, and a strong commitment to community enrichment are the foundation of the Amarillo College Suzuki Program.



Suzanne Grooms, one of the first American teachers to travel to Japan to study the teaching method of Dr. Shinichi Suzuki, began teaching violin students in her home. Soon, she recruited fellow Amarillo Symphony violinist Helen Gerald to train in the method and teach with her. With a small, but established, group of young students, Mrs. Grooms was the force behind the establishment of the Amarillo College Suzuki String Program. She taught violin and served as the program Coordinator until the fall of 2000. A tireless advocate of music education, Mrs. Grooms served on the Greater Southwest Music Festival board and volunteered countless hours at the festivals. She established the Amarillo Youth Orchestra at Amarillo College, which grew into the Amarillo Symphony Youth Orchestra in 1987. A longtime board member of the Amarillo Symphony, Mrs. Grooms also volunteered for Amarillo Symphony Guild, Art Force and her church choir.



Helen Gerald Helen Gerald was co-founder and instructor of violin and viola in the Amarillo College Suzuki String Program from its beginning in 1976 to 2009. She served as Performance Coordinator and Director of Avanti Violins. Already a well-established traditional private teacher with over 36 years of experience, she quickly became sold on the Suzuki method after researching its innovative ideas and results, saying, "I see the value of this program every day. It's so invigorating to work with young children and to see them grow." She started playing the violin and piano at age 7, studied in Topeka and Kansas City. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in music at Washburn University in Topeka. She pursued graduate studies at University of Kansas, University of Iowa and University of Michigan. Helen played in the Amarillo Symphony for 63 years serving as 1st violinist, Concertmaster, Assistant Concertmaster, violist; she also served as librarian, on Board of Directors, Personnel Committee and Orchestra Committee.



Beverly de la Bretonne continues part-time on the music faculty at Amarillo College where she taught full-time for twenty-five years. She is also Music Director of the AC Suzuki Program, a registered Suzuki teacher-trainer, and is frequently invited to teach in workshops around the country. A native of Monroe, Louisiana, her major areas of study were violin, flute and piano as she obtained her B.M.E. degree from University Louisiana Monroe. She received her M.M.E. degree (studying Suzuki Pedagogy with John Kendall) from Southern Illinois University—Edwardsville in 1969. After graduation, she was invited to coordinate John Kendall's Suzuki Program at the University. After ten years in this position, she moved to Amarillo to take the position at AC. Mrs. de la Bretonne is a member of the Amarillo Symphony and the AC Faculty Trio/Quartet. She performs frequently in the community and in her church music program. She received the honor of Professor Emeritus at Amarillo College in 2013.

"Our purpose does not lie in a movement to create professional musicians, but to create persons of a beautiful mind and fine ability. We engage in human education through an unparalleled, uniquely musical approach."

— Shinichi Suzuki