

'It's been a phenomenal rise': Boston Children's Chorus, started by Newton man, to go national

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Daily News Tribune

Posted Jan 06, 2009 @ 11:46 PM

NEWTON — When he sits in the audience at Boston's Jordan Hall later this month, Hubie Jones will experience a project that's been six years in the making.

The adventure began in 2002 when the Newton resident first heard the Chicago Children's Choir at the City Year National Convention. The creation of the Boston Children's Chorus, for Jones, has been a dream fulfilled.

As the harmonies of children's voices flow together for the Jan. 19 concert, Jones said he will smile with pride.

On that day, the entire nation will be watching.

"Most people are blown away that we've achieved this much," Jones said from a practice space in its downtown Boston offices in late December. "It's been a phenomenal rise."

Since he began knitting together the frameworks of a children's chorus, Jones has played witness to the transformation of nearly 300 children through music. He said he watched as they shaped a community where racial and socio-economic differences no longer divide.

On Jan. 19, those children will perform in a Martin Luther King Jr. Concert that will be broadcast on television screens from Boston to San Francisco.

"This year, for the first time, it will be seen nationally," he said. "This is huge."

Through the concert, Jones wants to ensure Martin Luther King Jr. Day is not forgotten amid ski trips and shopping excursions, but that it is celebrated in meaningful ways.

It was from those chairs in Jordan Hall that Jones watched Martin Luther King Jr. deliver a speech in the 1960s, and he's determined to have that message ring through the hall and beyond.

Bolstered by inspiration from King's speech, Jones launched his lifelong struggle for social justice. Whether it was through advocacy work in the Boston Public Schools, serving on dozens of boards for local nonprofits including City Year, or working as a professor at Boston University's School of Social Work, he's fought to make Boston a better community for everyone.

But his work in establishing the Boston Children's Chorus, he said, is probably the pinnacle of his career.

"He is a visionary. Few visionaries are able to make their visions a reality, but he's done it," said Annette Rubin, executive director of the Boston Children's Chorus. "It's his brainchild. This is his baby."

It's also a second home for the hundreds of children from a wide gamut of backgrounds who come here to rehearse on a weekly basis.

"I feel like I am part of something that is larger than myself," said Georgia Halliday, a member of the premier chorus and a Newton South student. "I love it. I spend as much time here as possible."

Said Cyrus Dahmubed, a sophomore from Auburndale who is home-schooled, "You come here and it's like home. It's better than home. And then you have to go back to reality."

When Jones started the process of creating a children's chorus in Boston to match the excellence of the one in Chicago, he envisioned an organization that would not only lift children up and provide them opportunities they couldn't get elsewhere, but would also act as an extended family.

"I woke up late in life and realized music is the best way to bring people together," he said. "I had tried everything else."

Within the last few months, he's seen singers stand in to help when a member's home was destroyed by fire, support a member whose friend passed away, and launch an extensive volunteer operation at a local homeless shelter.

As high school students filed in for a recent practice, Jones said, "The empowerment of kids was part of my vision, but to see this actualized is unbelievable."

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