

Cultural center to connect with schools

Starting with a seasoned acoustic guitarist, guest artists of the Largo center will teach kids a thing or two and invite talented novices to take the stage.

By LORRI HELFAND, Times Staff Writer
© St. Petersburg Times
published April 12, 2003

LARGO -- Thanks to a brand new artist-in-residence program at the Largo Cultural Center, local music students will get a taste of Appalachian, ragtime and Delta blues.

And some will get a chance to be stars for a night.

The cultural center has traditionally invited students for workshops with various artists. But next week, it hopes to start an annual tradition of intensive lessons in the arts at Largo schools.

Monday through Thursday, South Carolina acoustic guitarist Keith Knight will visit Largo Middle School and Largo High School to teach one-hour lessons in traditional and modern American folk music. He'll round out his visit with a public performance at the cultural center, where a few lucky students will open his show.

Knight, who has performed throughout the nation as a solo guitarist since 1993, specializes in finger-style guitar, rather than flat picking or strumming. His artist-in-residence program, funded by a \$2,000 grant from the Largo Rotary Club, will include lessons in blues and calypso music, slide guitar and songwriting.

"Hopefully, in this forum, I'll be able to show them just how diverse the instrument is," said Knight, 38. "I wish I had this type of thing when I was learning back in the early '70s."

Knight's program aligns with the center's ongoing mission to reach out to local schools, said Richard Haerther, cultural center manager.

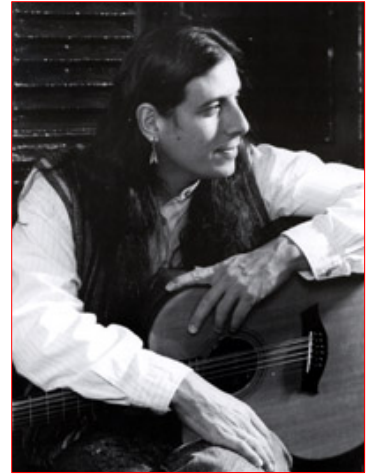
"It's an opportunity to learn more, to get exposed to and learn other musical genres and see how they may or may not relate to each other," he said.

Haerther discovered that Knight taught these workshops while looking through his promotional materials. He asked him if he'd like to do an artist-in-residence program here. Then, he talked with principals at Largo Middle and Largo High to see if they wanted to take part. He chose those schools because they were close and convenient to the center, Haerther said.

Largo High principal Barbara Thornton thought it was a great idea.

"I'm a very strong advocate of the fine arts," Thornton said. "I think it's extremely important for young people to become involved in them."

David Lynch, a music intern who helped coordinate the program at Largo Middle, said the one-on-one lessons will steer the novice guitar players in the right direction.



Keith Knight
photo by Lauren Preller
Chambers

The center is applying for a \$1,750 state grant from the Division of Cultural Affairs Arts in Education Program to cover a third of the expenses for next year's artist-in-residence program, led by the Momentum Dance Company. Students in that program will also have an opportunity to perform on the cultural center stage.

-- Lorri Helfand can be reached at 445-4155 or at lorri@sptimes.com .

If you go

Keith Knight will perform at 7:30 p.m. Thursday at the Largo Cultural Center, 105 Central Park Drive. Tickets are \$12 reserved. Call 587-6793.