March 26, 2019

A Note For Our Students, Community Members & Friends,

I wanted to take this opportunity to introduce myself, to share some news about our Armitage campus, and to answer the most commonly asked question students have asked me since I came on as the new CEO of the School: “How can I help?”

I come to the School after a long stint as a marketing executive at Boeing, as a former board member, a current guitar student, music store customer, and frequent concert-goer. My roots to the School go even farther back to my dad’s love of folk music. Long story short, I get this place and this community (though, admittedly, I still have a lot to learn). I see my appointment as a sacred trust that I will do all I can to help move the School forward while never forgetting who we are.

At the end of my first month on the job, I find myself filled with optimism and energy. Having met students in the lobby, in my office, at donor breakfasts, and even a few in class (I am taking “Blues Band Live!” with Steve Hutchins this session), it is evident that we all share a common desire to see the School thrive and to see our community grow. Our shared enthusiasm is a great foundation upon which we can build our future.

The enthusiasm of our students underpinned a recent Board decision to keep our campus at 909 W. Armitage open, and we will not be moving forward with marketing the building for sale at this time. The plan that they approved was developed as a part of a months-long, concerted effort from a working group that included members of our board, students, community members, volunteers, faculty, and staff. They saw what I have seen: a committed and engaged community of learners that wants to help.

We still have to prove that we can make the plan work by raising the extra funds needed to refurbish 909 W. Armitage and by increasing enrollment in Lincoln Park and Lincoln Square. It will be a challenge, but not one that is outside of our ability to overcome.  

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So, because a number of you have asked how you can help, I wanted to provide you simple, straightforward suggestions:

1. **Participate in classes and attend concerts**
   Teaching amazing classes and showcasing artists on our stages is why we are here. By taking our classes and attending our concerts and events, you help us achieve our mission and allow the organization to continue to provide the programming you love. Our next session of classes begins the week of April 29th, and I hope that you will sign up for your next class...or two!

2. **Invite a friend to join you**
   Most people find the School through “word of mouth.” Our students and volunteers are amazing ambassadors for our classes and events. If you love the programming at Old Town School, let your friends, family, and co-workers know, and encourage them to join in the fun. Bringing your friends makes a huge difference!

3. **Make a contribution/raise money on our behalf**
   The School is powered by contributions large and small. By becoming a member, making a contribution, hosting a Facebook birthday fundraiser (seriously, these help), or simply asking a friend to join you in contributing, you help support our mission and make Chicago a better, more musical place. Your contributions help refurbish facilities, provide financial aid, run programs on Chicago’s south and west sides, and much, much more. Everything helps!

As we begin this season of renewal and growth, I hope that you will continue to enjoy your own renewal and growth through classes and concerts at the School. Thank you for your continued support, and I look forward to seeing you in Lincoln Square, Lincoln Park, or in one of the many parts of Chicagoland where you can find Old Town School programming.

Sincerely,

Jim Newcomb
CEO, Old Town School of Folk Music