



EXTRA EDITION!

By COMMISSIONER JOE SCHMIDT
Alaska Department of Corrections
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WELCOME TO THE COMMISSIONER'S CORNER:

Thanks for continuing to check in with this column. If you have ideas, issues or suggestions from institutions or field offices, please submit them to [Richard Schmitz@correct.state.ak.us](mailto:Richard_Schmitz@correct.state.ak.us) or call 465 4640.



WINTER CONCERT FILLS HILAND MOUNTAIN WITH MUSIC:

Hiland Mountain Correctional Center was once again an institution filled with music as the Hiland Mountain Women's Orchestra presented its 2nd Annual Winter Concert on Saturday, December 16.

Sponsored by the non-profit organization Arts on the Edge, the beginning, intermediate, and advanced inmate orchestra members played a program of classical music and world holiday songs for an audience of more than 200 members of the community. Newly appointed Department of Corrections Commissioner Joe Schmidt attended along with his wife, Sandra. HMCC Superintendent Dean Marshall welcomed family and friends of orchestra members and others who had purchased the \$25 tickets. The Soroptomist club of Anchorage provided refreshments, as it has for all of the concerts at Hiland.

The string orchestra was founded at HMCC in 2003 through the efforts of Pati Crofut and Janice Weiss and held its first public concert in June 2004. Concerts have continued each June and were such a success that the group decided to add an annual winter concert. The orchestra currently has 20 members who receive instruction from Conductor Gabrielle Willis. Ms. Willis is also the instructor/conductor of the West High and Bartlett High Orchestras and the Junior Youths Symphony. She plays violin with the Anchorage symphony.



Special guests of the Winter Concert were the members of the West High Honor Orchestra. They revved the audience with the Fiddler's Fury and the Correlli Christmas Concerto and then joined the Hiland Women's String Orchestra for the final three songs of the day. The finale was the African Bell Carol, a tribal rendition of the Ukrainian Bell Carol complete with a myriad of percussion rhythms.

Hiland orchestra members commented about how inspired they were to hear the high school students play. They said they are more motivated than ever now to continue their practicing throughout the year.

As a special surprise for Gabrielle Willis, who comes to HMCC every Saturday to teach all three orchestra levels, Judge John Suddock presented her with a check for \$1,000, courtesy of the Anchorage Superior Court judges. He explained that the judges have an investment in promoting this positive program for female offenders. He also noted that as far as he could tell, Gabrielle Willis is the only conductor of a women's prison orchestra.

The Hiland orchestra members will be presenting another concert open to the public this spring. If anyone would like to be on the email list to receive further information, contact Pati Crofut at crofutp@aol.com.