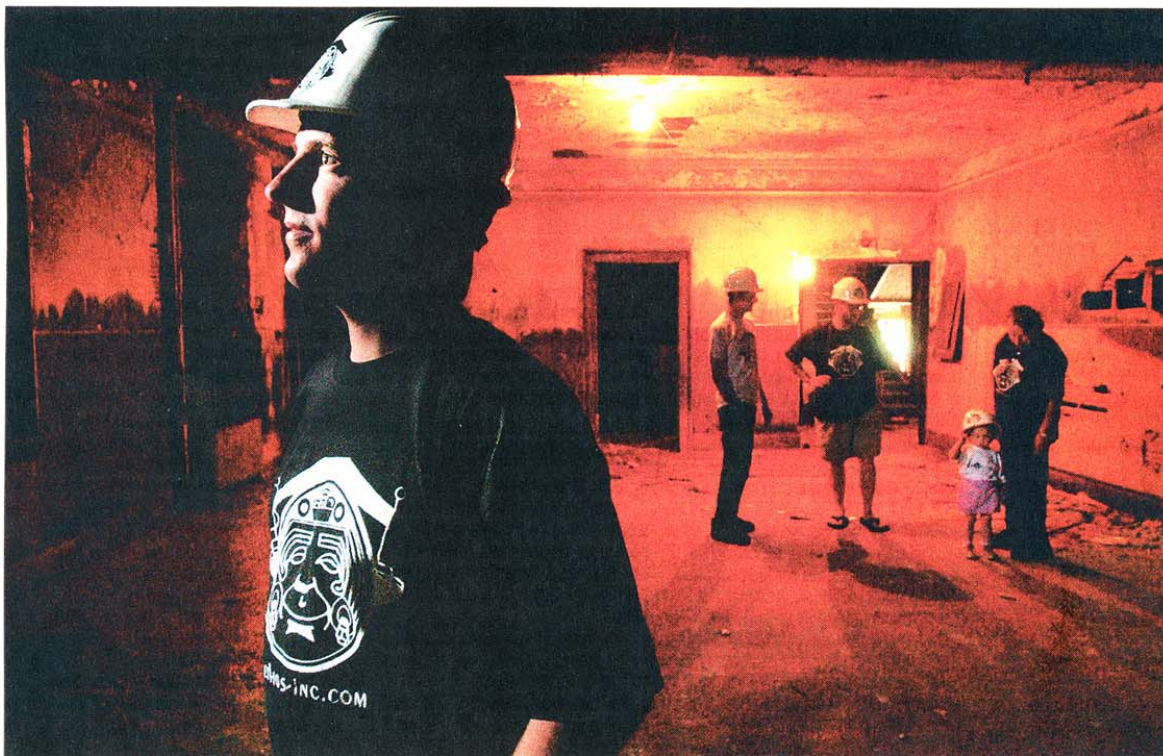


BUILDING TO A CRESCENDO



Charles Lewis' vision is helping to build a home to bring music into the lives of Portland's children

By **RANDY GRAGG**
THE OREGONIAN

It takes a lot of imagination to see what Charles Lewis sees.

As he leads a tour through the fire-damaged, vandalized, rotting, 18,000-square-foot Masonic Lodge at North Killingsworth Street and Commercial Avenue, he points to where hundreds of kids will one day learn music after school.

This dream is between \$1.2 million and \$2.7 million away from reality in the worst economy in 20 years. But standing in the wreckage of both the building and the times, the 31-year-old Lewis looks past all doubt to pure possibilities: the future stage, practice rooms, recording studios and artist-in-residence apartments and the logical next step for his 4-year-old after-school music program, Ethos Inc.

"This is our community," Lewis says. "We're building it stronger through music."

Last week, Ethos bought the 1923 building from the Portland School District for \$320,000. On Monday, Lewis and friends — among them, the famed local band Pink Martini — are having a block party from 1 to 4:30 p.m. to celebrate (see box).



If all goes according to Lewis' plan, Ethos will be teaching music in the building in just two years.

If that ambition seems foolhardy given the state of the building now, consider how Lewis started Ethos: with a credit card. A graduate of the University of Portland and Harvard University's School of Public Policy, Lewis slept on a friend's couch and took no salary for Ethos' first year of operation, in 1999. Now, with a \$400,000 annual budget, Ethos has five full-time employees and 47 part-time music teachers who teach

Charles Lewis plans to transform the vandalized, partially burned interior of a long-boarded-up Masonic Temple into the headquarters for the after-school music program he founded, Ethos Inc.

The former Masonic Temple and future home of Ethos Inc. is across the street from Jefferson High School in North Portland.

Photos by
MOTOYA NAKAMURA
THE OREGONIAN

RESTORATION CELEBRATION

What: A block party celebrating Ethos Inc.'s campaign for a new headquarters

Who: Performances by Pink Martini, the Jefferson Reunion Choir and Ethos Student Recital

Where: 5308 N. Commercial Ave.

When: 1-4:30 p.m. Monday

Admission: Free

Details: 503-283-8467, www.ethos-inc.org

Ethos: Kids pick instruments and music style

Continued from Page D1

280 kids a week. Ethos has started 48 after-school music programs and brought music to about 18,000 students statewide through more than 100 school assemblies.

As the horns, guitars, violins, drum kits and DJ turntables packed into the current headquarters, at 27 N.E. Killingsworth St., attest, what Ethos offers aren't the xylophone classes that remain the only instrument taught in some district schools. With instructors ranging from traditional music teachers to Portland Opera performers to band members from Jesus Presley and Pink Martini, Ethos lets kids try on any musical style or instrument they want, Lewis says, from hip-hop to classical. And all on a sliding scale from nothing to \$104 for eight weeks of music lessons.

The students have flocked to Ethos. So have the teachers. Lewis quips that his teacher-student ratio could easily be three instructors for every kid.

"But we're mainly constrained by our building," Lewis says of the tiny, trailerlike current home.

Two years ago, Lewis approached Portland Public Schools about buying the long-vacant Masonic Lodge. The building, to him, was ideal: a stately, three-story brick edifice across the street from Jefferson High School. In the more optimistic days of the mid-'90s, the school district itself had hoped to convert it into the "Jefferson Performing Arts Annex."

But now, of the Portland Public Schools' 89 elementary, middle and high schools, according to Glenn Ludtke, who oversees performing arts programs for the district, 33 have no district-sponsored music programs at all.

In North Portland, music education is even more limited. Of the

"Charles is a visionary. He's not looking to get bucks off the students. Everything he does is first-rate. The new building is in a tremendous location to give students even more access."

GLENN LUDTKE,

ABOUT THE FOUNDER OF ETHOS, CHARLES LEWIS

nine-school Jefferson High School cluster, Ludtke notes, only four schools offer music programs. Of those, Ockley Green Middle School's is after-school only, Whitaker Middle School's has no instruments and Jefferson High School — supposedly the district's performing arts magnet school — offers only piano and gospel singing after school.

"Charles is a visionary," Ludtke says. "He's not looking to get bucks off the students. Everything he does is first-rate. The new building is in a tremendous location to give students even more access."

Though many small arts groups have faltered by changing their focus from programming to building ambitious headquarters, Lewis and Ethos' board remain fearless.

"If your focus is to be a permanent fixture in the Portland community, then focusing on a building is right on," says Betsy Brumm, chairwoman of Ethos' building committee. "I have great faith that Charles will get it done."

Lewis' motivation lies beyond music; his only experience as a musician was playing in a college garage band. After graduating from the University of Portland in 1994, he served in the Peace Corps in the Congo, finally landing at Harvard. There, he did his master's thesis in public policy and worked with the famed Cambridge, Mass., music venue, Club Passim, to develop educational programs for kids. In

1999, Lewis returned to Portland, having already applied for non-profit status to start Ethos Inc.

Brumm says Ethos is already meeting with officials from the Department of Housing and Urban Development to explore a potential low-interest federal loan. An East Coast foundation has asked for a proposal. The Meyer Memorial Trust just inked the first \$75,000 check of a \$200,000 grant for operations. And Ethos has received a steady flow of grants from the state's other funders, from the Ford Family Foundation to Oregon Community Foundation.

Lewis envisions a phased renovation depending on the flow of money. For an estimated \$1 million, Ethos could complete the

bottom-line seismic upgrade and begin working out of the building, "even if it's not pretty."

Lewis says music programs should be funded by the schools, "philosophically." But he adds, "realistically, I don't think it's going to happen."

"Should we do something? I think yes," he adds. "Plenty of studies show kids perform better in school, and get in less trouble, when there are music programs in the schools. By doing it from the ground up like this, we'll get all those benefits and also empower the community."

Randy Gragg: 503-221-8575;
randygragg@news.oregonian.com

BUILDING TO A CRESCENDO

Charles Lewis' vision is helping to bring music to the lives of Portland children • Living, D1



DE FERRAN WINS INDY 500

Gil de Ferran wins a sprint to the finish for his first Indianapolis 500 victory • Sports, E1

MONDAY

May 26, 2003

The Oregonian

SUNRISE
EDITION

+h