

Monday, January 29, 2007

Assistant director for orchestra continues love of music

By Nicole Hollimon

Henry Neighbor News Editor

Stockbridge resident Carl Rieke, 31, can play a concerto with the best of them, but nurturing pigs is not too far down on the list of talents.

"I have a very strange background," Rieke said. "I grew up on a hog farm in Minnesota."

Rieke is one of two assistant conductors with the Southern Crescent Symphony Orchestra and orchestra teacher at the newly constructed Ola Middle School, one of only three orchestra programs in Henry County Schools.

In between feeding hogs and fixing tractors Rieke became a musician, starting violin lessons at age 6 at the suggestion of his sister's piano teacher, who thought he had an ear for music, particularly string instruments.

"With strings you need to have good listening skills," he said. "When you put your fingers on the strings, if you move them a tiny bit, you'll be out of tune."

Rieke was one of only five string players in Fairfax, Minn., population 1,200. After graduating from college with a degree in instrumental music education for grades K-12 in 1997, he relocated to metro Atlanta, landing his first teaching job in Clayton County. It was there that Rieke first connected with Richard Bell, founder and director of the Southern Crescent Symphony Orchestra. At Bell's invitation, Rieke began playing in 1997 and continued for two years.

Transferring to Gwinnett County Schools caused him to take a hiatus, but Rieke's decision to begin teaching in Henry County in 2006 brought him back to Southern Crescent, this time in a directorial role. Now Rieke performs, teaches and conducts and each brings him a different satisfaction.

"[Teaching is] a way to spread my passion to other kids. I want my kids to have fun but at the same time I hold very high standards," he said.

When conducting, Rieke can release his emotional attachment to music, while performing allows him to concentrate intently on the task at hand.

"It's a way to sort of put aside everything you're thinking about," Rieke said.

The self-proclaimed "classical buff" counts composers Mozart, Beethoven, Verdi and Corelli as

favorites.

Rieke is also an "avid outdoorsman" who enjoys deer hunting and a round of golf.

"When I go hunting I can sit out in the woods and just enjoy nature," Rieke said.

But raising his 2-year-old son, David, with wife Stacy does not allow for much of that. Rieke hopes David will be musically inclined and love it as much he does, but does not want to force him, although he said a little prompting never did any harm.

"I will probably guide him toward a string instrument at some point," Rieke said.