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MIAMI BEACH

SoBe Institute for the Arts seeks funds for needy kids

Facing budget cuts, the South Beach Institute of the Arts is looking for help to fund summer camp scholarships for needy kids.

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The SoBe Institute of the Arts is looking for help to fund scholarships for needy students. For information on making a donation, go to www.sobearts.com or call 305-674-9220. Summer-camp sessions begin Monday and run until August.

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BY LYNETTE ZILIO
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Eleven-year-old Angel Perez dreams of becoming a famous pianist. Ray Breslin wants to help him make that dream a reality.

Angel has been taking piano classes at the SoBe Institute of the Arts for nearly two years, relying on scholarships to fund his aspirations to play pieces by Mozart and Bach.

But this year, facing financial cutbacks, the nonprofit institute has had to cut scholarships for its summer camp.

Breslin, president of the Collins Park Neighborhood Association, recently launched a campaign to help fund scholarships for needy children who want to take part in the institute's summer program, which includes sessions

devoted to musical theater, dance and film, among other pursuits.

Angel is the first student to win a scholarship thanks to the campaign: Breslin donated \$450 to cover Angel's tuition this summer.

"Receiving the scholarship makes me feel really happy," said Angel, an honor roll student at Fienberg Fisher Elementary who turns 11 on Sunday.

Breslin was sitting in the audience of the institute's spring concert last month when he first heard that the \$30,000 in Miami-Dade County funds used for the summer camp had been cut.

He was inspired to help.

"If you don't take care of the institutions in your backyard, it's like not watering your grass," he said.

He presented his idea to Carson Kievman, the institute's executive artistic director.

Kievman jumped at the idea.

Together, they decided that Breslin would sponsor one child's summer tuition.

"Our mission is to give youth and teens an opportunity to study at this level without regard to finance," Kievman said. "Our loss of funding was a big blow. We had to find new ways to think out of the box to continue our mission and keep our quality."

Summer camp sponsorships range from \$350 for theater and dance programs, \$450 for music and \$500 to \$550 for teen musical theater and film workshops.

But donations of any amount are welcome, Breslin said.

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Donors can choose to remain anonymous or they can opt to meet the child they are sponsoring or receive a thank-you note.

In 2008, 67 percent of the institute's younger students were on some sort of scholarship.

Although he is thrilled with the institute's new scholarship program, Kievman said that it won't solve all the institute's problems.

"We won't make up for that kind of money, but it'll make a difference in the kids' lives," he said.

Although Angel has been playing for less than two years, he was chosen as the scholarship's first recipient because of his dedication, Kievman said.

"Angel is one of our best and brightest students," he said. "He's too great to let go."

Angel's family couldn't be happier with the scholarship.

"We are very excited and would like to see more people involved," said Ginette Perez, Angel's mother. "Angel started from scratch, but he's surely on his way to becoming an accomplished pianist."

Angel delights in tickling the ivories alongside the professional musicians that serve as instructors.

"Without music, I wouldn't be where I am today," he said. "And it makes me have fun in my life."

Breslin has been looking for more donors to help kids like Angel.

"I look at SoBe Arts as empowerment," he said. "It keeps these kids out of trouble and gives them creativity."



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