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## Violin restorer's job makes sweet music

By John Pirro  
staff writer

BETHEL -- Brian Epp's stepson no longer plays the violin.

But partly because of the boy's year-long flirtation with the instrument when the family lived in Colorado seven years ago, Epp, a former woodworker and graphic artist, has a new career, repairing and restoring violins and other stringed instruments.

"My wife bought a violin about the same time, and I started looking at how such a flimsy thing could make such a wonderful sound," he said.

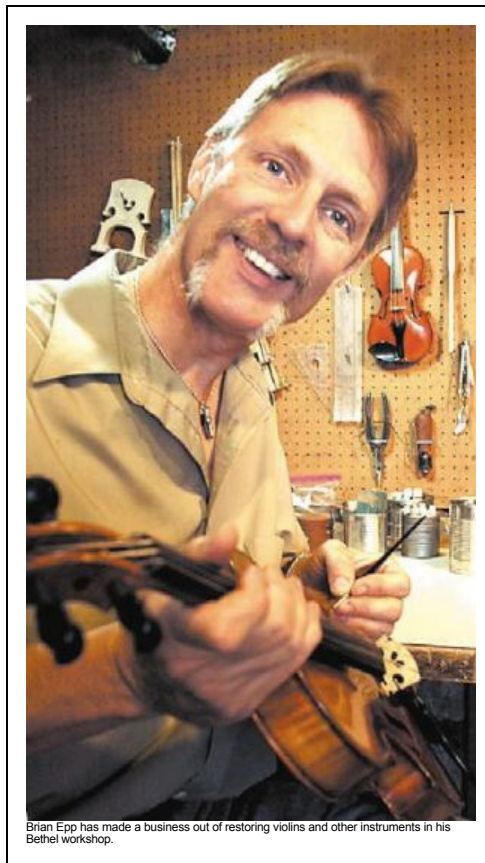
Intrigued, Epp plunked down \$50 for a battered instrument at a local music shop and promptly took it apart.

Soon, Epp was apprenticing in the instrument repair trade, taking courses and buying other used violins on the Internet, fixing them and putting them up for sale.

Three years ago the family moved to Bethel, and he began restoring instruments full time.

Not only does he restore violins, cellos and basses to playing condition, Epp also utilizes his artistic talents to match the original finishes, making the repairs indistinguishable from the rest of the instrument.

"I always worked with my hands," said Epp, who built his own rubber band-powered wooden airplanes as a child. "The thing I love about this is that it combines being an artist and a craftsman at the same time."



Brian Epp has made a business out of restoring violins and other instruments in his Bethel workshop.

Epp gets his clients from a variety of sources. Some come through his Web site, where he does business as Artisan Violin Restorations.

He's also established contacts with symphonies and does a considerable amount of work for school systems in New York state and Connecticut.

"He's been terrific to work with," said Julie Overland, orchestra teacher at Bethel Middle School. "He and his wife, Kathleen, gave a presentation to our students on how stringed instruments are made, and most of the students enjoyed it very much."

Students, especially in the middle school, can be tough on their instruments, Overland said, and she was happy to find there was "an excellent repairman in town."

Epp said even professionals have been known to leave their stringed instruments in a car where the buildup of heat during the summer or freezing temperatures in winter, combined with humidity, can result in cracking, warping or separations where pieces have been joined.

Changes in atmospheric pressure when an instrument is taken on an airplane can also result in damage.

"If it's not repaired, it will affect the sound," Epp said.

The oldest instrument Epp ever worked on was made in 1855, and the most valuable was worth about \$15,000. But more typical, he said, is a client who contacts him because "I found my grandfather's violin in the attic and I want my daughter to play it."

In those cases, the sentimental value of the instrument, rather than the intrinsic value, makes it worthwhile for them to pay for the restoration, he said.

"One of the most important things is to work with the history of the violin," Epp said.

In one case, a woman asked him to repair her father's violin, which, among other problems, had been played so much that part of the wood had been worn away.

The woman said that her father would disappear for two or three weeks every year, then return home. The family later found out he would join up with a group of Gypsies and play the violin with them.

In that case, Epp said, he repaired the violin so it was playable, but with the client's consent left the worn-away section untouched.

"I could have fixed it, but she agreed it was part of the instrument's history," he said.