

CHOIR REVIVAL

Timothy Eaton's choir school sings a new tune

When Marty Smyth arrived at the cathedral style United Church at St. Clair and Avenue Road as the new organist three years ago, he knew he had his work cut out for him. There were just eight singers in the choir school which had been started by eminent musician and scholar David Ouchterlony some 50 years ago.

Last year Smyth counted 58 children ages 4 to 18 in his charge, all participating in weekly choir practices and theory lessons, as well as private 1/2-hour voice or piano lessons. (A few graduated high school last June, leaving him with 47.) Just how did he pull off this miracle?

"Ironically, it wasn't through adding the music lessons at all," he says, "but having a little happy, fun community. We enjoy hanging out with each other, playing

rhythm games, working with instruments and dancing. Then we bash through our Sunday anthems."

It may also have something to do with the price. Tuition is only about \$200 a year. "We were very lucky to have Mr. Ouchterlony's endowment," explains Smyth. "We couldn't pay the tutors (some of whom are currently or formerly with the Canadian Opera Company) without it. It is an awfully good deal."

Each Sunday one of the primary, junior or senior choirs performs a selection from a repertoire that spans from Disney to John Rutter, often in three- and four-part harmonies.

The children will be participating in a Christmas concert at the Carlu on December 19. Visit temc.net for details.



MOTHER OF INVENTION BABY'S FIRST JOURNAL KEEPS NEW MOMS ORGANIZED

When local resident Lindsay Harris was first discovering the joys of motherhood two and half years ago, she found she was often scrambling for a piece of paper to write down feedings and diaper changes. Newborn daughter Ainsley lost more than 10 percent of her body weight while in hospital, so tracking these daily events was important to ensuring she was getting enough breast milk. When her second daughter, Juliet, was born last December, Harris decided she would create something to keep her organized. Thus was born Baby's First Journal.

"We had a great response from the local blogs," says Harris, whose business is called Glow Baby (www.glowbaby.ca). "Everybody wishes they had one when their children were babies." The chic, purse-sized journal, \$15.99, is now available in 30 stores across North America, as well as online.

To create something "sophisticated, savvy and fashion-forward" Harris hired a graphic designer and drew on her husband's experience in the printing industry.

The initial print run of 2,000 copies used paper containing 10% post-consumer waste, but Harris was pleased to be able to afford to increase to 50% post-consumer waster for the second print run, and a new product, a series of notebooks.

"I designed a medicine pad because I could never remember when I've given the doses, and sometimes my daughter isn't the that reliable to say whether she's had it or not. It's also a good way for my husband and I to communicate." The shopping list includes a space for recipes and the to-do list has a magnet for sticking it on the fridge.

No doubt Harris' to-do list is overflowing with ideas!

HOSTING OVER THE HOLIDAYS?

A little organization now can help you stay sane later

The holidays are a wonderful time for families to get together, but if you're the host, a lot of organization is required. To get some tips from a pro, we spoke to St. Clair West's organizing expert Tina Blazer of Spot-On Organizing. Here's her advice:

TODAY

Clean the house room by room. Pick a room each day or organize a plan with a professional cleaner to get it done.

- Declutter to make room for guests. Who will sleep where? Where will guests put clothes and suitcases? Organize the guestroom, playroom or home office to accommodate your guests. Start by relocating toys and papers. Remove decorative items from tables to allow for toiletries and personal items. Make space in

closets and provide extra hangers. Purchase over-the-door hooks for extra hanging space. An air mattress is a quick and space-efficient solution.

- Purge. Throw out or donate unneeded stuff. Have two boxes in a main hall and mark one for donations and one for junk. Get the family involved.
- Organize your guest items. Gather and launder extra blankets. Do you need to buy guest towels, bathrobes, magazines, travel sized toiletries, candies, etc.?
- Start your shopping list. Ask guests about dietary needs. Select recipes, check your pantry, continuously add to your list. Terrible at desserts or appetizers? Buy them and give yourself a break!

1 WEEK BEFORE Clear your dining room and kitchen tables. Put a special table cloth

on it to force people to remember it's cleared off for a reason!

- Organize plates and serving dishes. Make a list of what you think you'll need. Borrow or buy inexpensive serving dishes.
- Consider making dinner reservations at a restaurant if guests will be staying for a few days.
- Make space in your fridge. That bird needs lots of room!
- Prepare for leftovers. Organize food storage containers and lids. Kids love doing this. (Go figure.)
- Prepare for takeout. Purchase takeout cartons in multiple sizes to send food home with guests. (You won't have to scramble to find containers and guests won't need to return dishes.)
- Organize and tidy front and back entry

closets. Store out-of-season shoes, coats and sports stuff in a box to be sorted later. Better yet, do it now!

1 TO 3 DAYS BEFORE Go shopping. Bring your list and stick to it!

- Create a welcoming environment. Lay out towels, robes, water jugs, etc.
 - Prep food ingredients. Measure, chop, blanch veggies, make sauces, etc. Have ingredients in containers ready to go to make cooking faster.
 - Recheck your lists!
- Remember, says Blazer, the holidays and hosting should be enjoyable. Clean and organize in advance, so you can relax, have fun, and visit with a smile.

Got an organizing challenge? Email Tina at tina@spotonorganizing.com or visit www.spotonorganizing.com