

Age is no barrier to playing in band

■ The New Horizons group here is just the start of a nationwide effort to involve musical seniors.

BY STAFF WRITER

SHEILA RAYAM

The New Horizons Band has come a long way, baby.

Seven years ago, the neophyte group composed of senior citizens held its first public concert at the Memorial Art Gallery in Rochester.

Next month, the band heads for the bright lights and big stage of the Eastman Theatre for its first performance in that venue.

In 1990, Roy Ernst, professor of music education at the Eastman School, placed an ad in local newspapers soliciting members for a band comprised of older adults.

His goal was to provide more opportunity for people to become involved in music in their later years.

"There's a perfect match between what music has to offer and things that are really beneficial for senior adults," said Ernst. "Playing music as part of a group, working together toward a common goal and meeting new friends, all of

these things are really terrific for senior adults."

Little did Ernst know how successful the program would become. He was afraid only a handful of people would show up to the first New Horizons Band meeting — but nearly 60 people came.

Now, the band has more than 100 members ranging in age from 50 to 89. And thanks to Ernst, the New Horizons Band isn't just a Rochester happening.

"The New Horizons Band was intended as a model program that could be used in other locations," said Ernst.

"It turned out to be enormously successful... I now have a grant from the National Association of Music Merchants and the National Association of Band Instrument Manufacturers for two years to start New Horizons Bands all over the country."

There are now 32 New Horizons Bands in the United States, says Ernst.

Betty Katzen of Rochester has

been a member of the Rochester band since the beginning.

"Right away it was a great bunch of people," said Katzen, 77. "There was a lot of enthusiasm."

Although Katzen knew how to read music and play the piano before joining the band, she chose to learn something new. She took percussion lessons from the Eastman graduate students who give instrument instruction to the band members.

"I play orchestra bells and other things that need hitting," said Katzen.

Katzen never knew how much she missed playing an instrument until she joined the New Horizons Band.

"I just love having music in my life," said Katzen.

Katzen also loves the camaraderie among the band members. So does Mary Termotto of Brighton.

"We are like one big family. Everybody cares about everybody," said Termotto, 74.

"If one person has a problem, everybody is so compassionate."

Termotto, who joined the band at the urging of her son six years ago, plays the trombone. Before joining, she knew how to read

If you go

What: New Horizons Band spring concert featuring traditional band music, including show tunes and marches.

Where: The Eastman Theatre, 60 Gibbs St.

When: 7 p.m. June 2.

Admission: Free.

Call: 274-1000.

music and play the piano and guitar.

Being a member of the New Horizons Band has been more than fun for Termotto.

"It has been good for my health... physically and mentally," she said. "I'm out of a rut."

Termotto's son, Jim, agrees.

"The camaraderie has really been a major life saver... It gives her a social outlet," said Termotto, of Rochester.

"I really believe in their program."

The band's twice-weekly practices and concerts at neighborhood festivals, nursing homes and other locations have been a source of enrichment in the lives of band members.



AIMEE K. WILES staff photographer

Making music Howard Holmes plays the euphonium during practice of the New Horizons Band at Temple Beth El.

"Some of the people look upon this as their whole social life," said Richard Sitts of Fairport, one of the directors of the band.

"When you get to be in your 80s, it's your life's work," said Rita Rose, 83, of Victor. Rita and her husband Charles, 83, play the alto saxophone.

It's too late to join the New Horizons Band for the big spring con-

cert. However, anyone interested in joining the band should contact the Eastman School's community education division.

The requirements are simple. You have to be at least 50 years of age and have a desire to learn, said Sitts, 71.

Also, "You have to like chocolate doughnut holes," said Sitts, laughing. "We take coffee breaks." □