

# Students tune their skills at training school



Joe Tackett, a student at Southfield's Piano Technology Inc. school, removes springs from a keyboard with a dental tool.

By Neal Haldane  
staff writer

**K**AREN FORD takes a serious tone when she tells her students the key to success lies with the perfect pitch.

Ford is not an advertising teacher, but her studio is often strike the right chord for clients when it comes to piano tuning and repair.

Ford of Canton is the director of Piano Technology Inc., a state-licensed school located in the Nine Beech Plaza, Southfield.

"We teach everything from repairing small broken parts to restoring a piano," Ford said about the school, which has one full-time and five part-time students.

"We've had everything from young students looking for a career to people nearing retirement age who want something to do."

Piano Tech is paired with Keyboard Services, Inc., a firm run by Bruce Robinson of Taylor and Dick Halkiewicz of Farmington Hills.

The two firms cover the keyboards by repairing and restoring both organs and pianos. A number of churches use both the piano and organ repair services and Halkiewicz has ventured to Tiger Stadium several times to keep that instrument in play.

The two companies joined together in 1980 when Robinson and Halkiewicz, who had formed Keyboard Services in 1977 after leaving Grinnell's, asked Ford to join their firm.

"We added Karen as a way to expand into pianos," Robinson said.

WITH THE addition of Ford and the school, piano technician training and repairing now accounts for 60 percent of the business, Ford said.

"It's a very specific trade that is not easy to learn," Ford said. "But it's a nice profession because you can set your own hours and do as little or as much as you want."

That is what attracted both Joe Tackett, the school's current full-time student, and Ted Farquhar.

Tackett is a musician who realized "you can't play pop music all your life." For him, piano tuning and repair will allow him to remain close to music while earning a living.

Farquhar is a hospital orderly who is attending Piano Tech on a part-time basis.

"I don't think there are many young piano tuners around anymore," he said. "Most are in their '50s or '60s. I want to start out part time, build a clientele and then go full time."

Both students are enrolled in the most advanced curriculum — piano rebuilding.

Two other levels are offered at the school — piano tuning/minor repair and piano tuning/major repair.

"THE STUDENTS all have an involvement with music," Ford said. "I don't think I have ever had a student who didn't play something."

Training is offered on a one-to-one basis with students often accompanying Ford on her repair assignments in the field.

"They get a look at different kind of pianos and different kind of problems," she said. "Tuning is done every day, and the students work on projects ranging from restringing to refinishing to pin replacement. These are the things they will run into."

"We also take a lot of cases other people wouldn't. We take in disasters and try and make a piano out of them once again. The students learn a lot from that."

Students pay between \$35 and \$60 a week for the training depending on what level they are trying to achieve. A degree can be earned in one year, she said.

This kind of training is necessary because of the limited number of reputable piano tuners and repairers, Ford said.



Karen Ford, director of Piano Tech, explains the restoration work needed before a player piano can carry its tune again.

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