

Feel the rhythm Marsolek brings beat of life to new drummers

By Nancy Thornton
Acantha reporter

“**T**o play the rhythm and sustain it, I have to let go of other thoughts and concerns and listen deeply to the pattern as it unfolds again and again,” says Matthew Marsolek of the Drum Brothers group on its Web site, www.drumbrothers.com.

Marsolek was in Choteau last week for the eighth time in the past decade to host a drumming workshop, teaching the fundamentals of rhythm awareness and the tones and techniques of West African drumming to Choteau fifth- and sixth-grade students and to the 18 students at Bynum Elementary School.

In the evening Marsolek hosted a drum circle with 17 attendees at the Yin Yang Yoga studio on the second floor of the American Legion Hall (above Curly Willow Basins floral and gift shop). After the drumming event, his wife, Tracy Topp, directed an African dance workshop.

Marsolek said he was happy to be back in Choteau to see old friends and new faces for a full day of rhythm. He recalled a memorable drum-making workshop here in which the participants proudly burned their family brand in the finished drums. He said he has enjoyed working with Bynum School lead teacher Susan Luinstra over the years, and is pleased to see a resurgence of interest in what has become his life’s work.

Luinstra, who attended the evening drum circle, said the Bynum students enjoyed participating in the new cultural experience.

A resident of Arlee, Marsolek teaches workshops and classes



Community members enjoy drumming to a basis four-four rhythm during an educational workshop at Yin Yang Yoga Studio in Choteau.



Matthew Marsolek and his wife, Tracy Topp, start a drumming rhythm on West African drums.

in Missoula. He is part of a family business that makes drums while performing and educating people on the joys of music. His musical talents come out in performances with his brother, Michael, and several other performers under the

ensemble names, Drum Brothers and Mandir. He has released CDs with them, as well as two solo recordings.

The 17 people who attended the drum circle on Feb. 17 learned about the universal four-beat

rhythm that links all cultures. Marsolek spoke of cycles and pulse and how the ashiko drums sound differently depending on the diameter of the goatskin-covered head.

The sound changes depending on what part of the hands strike the head, he demonstrated. Everyone learned three hand positions and during the two-hour drum circle became adept at drumming as Marsolek signaled with his djembe, an hour-glass-shaped drum his family makes.

“Stay relaxed, be here, right now,” he said. “Focus on what you are doing.” The group did just that as the end of the session approached.

Choteau resident Zaneta Hirst, said she remembered an earlier drum circle Marsolek led several years ago after which the community members sustained its own drum circle for a time. “I really enjoyed the refresher, she said.

Pam Andersen, also from Choteau, said, “It was lots of fun. We all have rhythm.”