

*In the Appalachians of Virginia, mountain music and culture are one and the same. Musician Emily Spencer and the kids in her high school string band are helping to make sure it stays that way.*

**MUSIC HAS ALWAYS BEEN** a part of Emily Spencer's life, and given the rich bluegrass culture of her native Grayson County in Virginia, it's no surprise. A member of the critically acclaimed Whitetop Mountain Band, founded by Spencer's brother-in-law Albert Hash, Spencer has had a 35-year career playing traditional Appalachian music. Even so, she never imagined she'd help run an Appalachian music program for children.

Today, however, Spencer heads up one of the most innovative youth music programs in the nation in Whitetop, Va., exposing as many as 100 kids a year to the instruments and musical styles of their ancestors. The program began at the tiny Mt. Rogers School. Serving just under 100 students, grades K through 12, the school is among the smallest in Virginia and is scheduled to close within the next year. Spencer's music



program, however, will continue at the Grayson Highland School, a new school that will combine the students of Mt. Rogers with those from nearby Bridle Creek Elementary.

Hash officially started the music program more than 25 years ago at the urging of local parents and students who were taking private lessons from him and other members of his musical family. The Mt. Rogers School, which really didn't have

