



**SPIRIT OF ST. PATRICK'S** — Harpist Amy Kortuem will perform Celtic music and share Celtic history and stories 7:30 p.m. Saturday at Huntley Community Covenant Church.

## Harpist to share Celtic music, history

By DAVE SMITH  
Sentinel Staff Writer

FAIRMONT — Harps inspire visions of angels and scenes of serenity. However, when Amy Kortuem takes the stage with her Celtic harp, it's not the flutter of angel's wings or the stillness of a bubbling brook that will be remembered.

"This will not be a stiff harp concert, it will be fun," Kortuem promised. "I like to share stories about the songs, and Celtic history, Celtic spirituality and tradition. I'll be playing Irish music and special songs about St. Patrick's Day. What better time of year is there to hear the Celtic harp?"

Concert organizer Joyce Wetzler of Huntley looked for an opportunity to bring Kortuem to Huntley for some time. Wetzler attended school with Kortuem's parents, Karen and Jim, who graduated from Huntley High School, so she knew there was a local connection, but until the Community Covenant Church remodeled its facility there was no place that worked for a concert.

Wetzler knew Kortuem never performed in the area, so she contacted Kortuem to see if a date could be scheduled.

Kortuem said she would come, but she wanted to donate part of the proceeds to a charity. Wetzler thought of Habitat for Humanity and a date was set.

"It's so important to use your gifts to give back to the community," Kortuem said. "Since the harp was such a life changing gift to me, it's special to use it to help make someone else's life more enjoyable and maybe a little bit easier."

When Kortuem says the harp is a gift that changed her life, she is speaking literally. She was a piano player closing in on a music minor at Minnesota State University, Mankato in 1988 when family friend Jack McGowan gave her a harp. McGowan also included a book teaching yourself how to play the instrument. He knew she was a good pianist and figured that skill would transfer over to the harp. He was right.

"I have such a passion for it I don't want to play anything else," Kortuem admitted. "Once I set my fingers on the strings there has been nothing else ever since."

She plays all kinds of music and in all kinds of settings. She has played with the Mankato Symphony and at the St. Paul Irish Festival; she has played for children and for Mikhail Gorbachev; she has played in ensembles and solo. She takes requests, too.

"The things people request on the harp go from sublime to crazy," she said with a laugh. For example she played "O Canada" at a wedding and has been asked to play country music, too. "I get requests for 'Ave Maria' or Celtic music like 'Danny Boy.' I have a pretty wide repertoire."

Her Celtic harp is a pretty simple instrument, but her other harp is far more complicated.

"There are basically two types of harps," she explained. "The Celtic harp is mainly a folk instrument from the British Isles and it's tuned by levers to shorten the strings. But the concert harp has 40-plus strings with hundreds of moving parts. You change key by using pedals. You go from a simple instrument to a complicated technical instrument that orchestral music requires."

Another difference between the two types of harps is size. The Celtic harp is portable and can be tuned to play tunes as tradition requires. The concert harp, on the other hand, weighs about 100 pounds and must be acclimated to the environment it will be played in.

The concert on Saturday is the type Kortuem enjoys most. She said being close to the audience is something she particularly likes.

"I share music, things I've learned and stories. I like interactivity where I can develop a relationship with the audience and share what I love about music," Kortuem said. "I'm not unapproachable and untouchable."