

ON THE EDGE
but holdin' tight
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Arts and Entertainment

SEHS band director is 'touching the future'

Not long ago Greg Hall was knocking heads on football fields, wishing (like many high school seniors) he'd be recruited to a top-rate football college. He says he had his mind set on becoming a UCLA Bruin. The curtain fell unexpectedly on that aspiration, however, and now his letterman's jacket reminds him of something maybe ten pursuits away from the game of football.

"I got disillusioned with going out on Friday nights and beating up my body," he says. "One day I was walking the halls during free period, and I ended up in the band room. This trumpet player was playing something out of the technical studies book, which I found was the trumpet player's bible, and I just fell in love with the instrument."

"I asked the guy to teach me how to play. He looked at me kind of funny because I had my big letterman's jacket on, a look like, 'what's this guy doing?' But he started me out, and from there I started taking lessons. I said goodbye to all my football chums and got involved in the arts."

That experience set Hall in musical motion, and his momentum hasn't slowed since. Now, 12 years later, Hall is in his fourth year as band director at South Eugene High School and as leader of the Eugene Jazz Orchestra. He's also that much more convinced that music is his life.

Story by Eric Eloff
Photo by Shu-Shing Chen

You might say the 29-year-old trumpeter, director and educator has come a long way fast. He says even his students are perplexed about the idea that their instructor started five, maybe ten years later than they. But Hall, who's enthusiastic about helping children learn about themselves through music, is making a substantial difference at SEHS and in the town's larger musical arena.

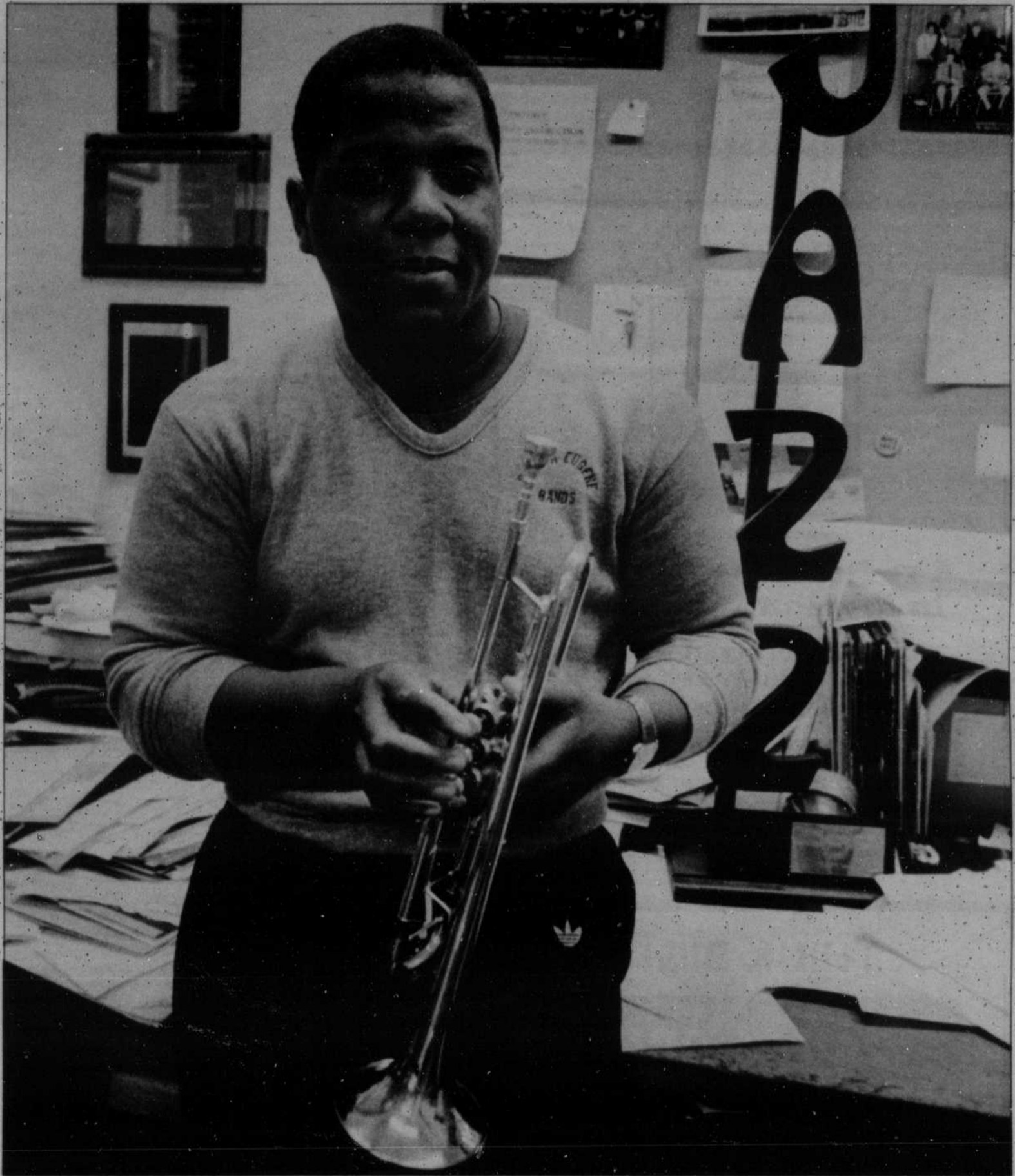
Perched inside an office cluttered with musical citations, trophies that look like decorative chalices, and note paper fighting to remain atop his desk, Hall fields questions from students while the phone rings off the hook — a normal setting, he says.

"I've been in the music-director business now six years," he says, "and there's nothing like kids. I remember when I was in high school I had a director I wanted to be like. He just really got me turned on about the possibilities of music as a career, performing and educating. And that's what I'm trying to do here: get kids excited about themselves via music."

Still, six years in the business has Hall thinking he's just as impressionable as his students. He makes mistakes. He tries hard. And at times, Hall says, he's immersed in 14-hour work days. But developing his skills and sharing them with his pupils has become the most important thing in his life.

"I'll never get rich at this," he says. "Teachers make diddley-squat in regard to the financial side of things. But we get rich in so many other ways. We're touching the future."

As an instructor Hall says he's not necessarily interested in turning out dozens of band directors or unparalleled



Greg Hall had his heart set on being a football star, but a high-school encounter with a classmate who played the trumpet changed that dream. He's now an accomplished local jazz trumpeter and teacher.

musicians. Rather, he's content with giving kids a working knowledge of their instruments, or what he calls, "a valid experience."

"If folks choose to go into music, that's great," he says. "But in this day and age I think if you have folks coming out of universities really charged up about what they're doing, they'll be the inspiring young adults and their intensity will rub off — you'll have more kids who want to study music."

Hall says he knew he wanted to be a band director after a few glimpses of his first instructor his senior year. What he didn't know, however, was what it took to generate the intensity his instructor

was able to give to him. At least until he entered North Texas State University at Denton in 1976.

"I went down there (Texas) with the attitude that, well, I'm a pretty good trumpet player; I will make something versus using North Texas State as an educational experience and getting in there to pay my dues," he says. "When I got down there I found I was another number and had to start all over again."

Hall attributes his success at NTSU to the intense competition among students and the good share of teachers willing to "bend over backwards to help you out."

When he was there, he says, NTSU had 1400 musicians enrolled.

Sometimes, 150 trumpet players had to compete for only four or five spots in one of the nine different jazz bands.

"It's the kind of thing where you either sink or swim," he says. "It was frustrating at first, but the teachers were so positive, and the students were so intense about learning all types of music. That school pumped me up for what I wanted to do, and that was to get kids pumped up about themselves through music."

In preparation for more serious times, when students make way into the often

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