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TEACHERS IN THE BAND



LOVE OF MUSIC DRAWS TEACHERS TOGETHER AFTER SCHOOL HOURS

By **DAMIAN MULINIX**
For EO Media Group

LONG BEACH, Wash. — For many music teachers, the music doesn't stop when the bell rings. For some, it's only just the beginning. Three local school music teachers, and another who is retired, have been moonlighting in area jazz and symphonic bands.

"There is definitely camaraderie among most musicians, and a similar camaraderie amongst teachers," Brian Bergman, a Long Beach School music teacher, said recently. "Often, music teachers have an even stronger sense of support and understanding for each other."

Bergman, Ilwaco High's Rachel Lake, Ocean Park School's Brian Vessey and retired teacher Bob Walters have all gravitated toward the North Coast Big Band and North Coast Symphonic Band — both led by longtime band leader Lee Stromquist. The big band also features a number of music teachers from Clatsop County schools.

We're with the band

Aside from Walters, who has played bass in the big band for three years, the other three teachers are fairly new to the group, joining after spots opened up recently.

"I perform with the group because I like the style of music, and in order to contribute to (its) success," said Bergman, who considers himself a "low brass specialist." He plays euphonium, tuba and trombone, the instrument he plays in the big band. His wife, Jenny, also plays piano in the group.

Lake came to the band by way of a former Dixieland group, another Stromquist band that she played in after moving to the area some 10 years ago.

"I had put a bug in his ear years ago about, if he ever had a spot open in the big band, I'd love to play saxophone," said Lake, who plays baritone saxophone in the group, an instrument she has played since college.

"I love honking on that thing," she said.

Stromquist had also been on the lookout for trumpet players, which led to Lake introducing him to Vessey.

"I really enjoy performing music with others," Vessey said. "It is what influ-



Photos by **DAMIAN MULINIX**/
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ABOVE: Ilwaco High School music teacher Rachel Lake performs with the North Coast Big Band at a recent show at the Chinook Event Center. Lake recently joined the group as a way to "Get more involved musically, to enrich myself." **TOP:** Long Beach School music teacher Brian Bergman plays trombone with the North Coast Big Band at a recent show in Chinook. Bergman also plays with the North Coast Symphonic Band.

'Often, music teachers have an even stronger sense of support and understanding for each other.'

Brian Bergman
Long Beach School music teacher

enced me to become a music teacher."

Lake's teenage son Christopher was also added to the group, on trumpet, after his mom joined.

Teachers teaching teachers

Lake said it was a professional goal of hers this year to "get more involved musically to enrich myself."

"That way I could get more in touch with what the students are doing," she explained. "Instead of just talking about it, I'm also participating in it. I make time for it to make myself professionally better as a musician and teacher."

Lake said there is a camaraderie among the teachers in the bands that produces new ideas and styles that she in turn takes to her students.

"It's a hands-on learning environment instead of a text book," she said.

Bergman agreed: "We share a common language and understanding based on the experiences we share. As a music teacher, playing in a group can help us remember what it's like to be directed in a large ensemble. It also helps us grow as people and musicians."

According to Walters, it's not terribly surprising for like-minded teachers to collaborate in this way.

"Many music teachers consider themselves musicians, in addition to what we do in the classroom, and keep an eye out for other opportunities," he said.

Walters, who has played in a number of bands during his 19 years with the Ocean Beach School District, also played French horn in the Oregon Army National Guard band for 15 years.

Vessey, who played in a pair of jazz bands after college, said he likes that there are opportunities for the teachers in the group to conduct the band at times.

"We can see different techniques that we can translate to our own groups," he said. "Plus, music teachers tend to be pretty awesome people."

Scheduling can sometimes be a challenge, but it's worth it, Vessey added.

"At times it can be difficult," he said. "I am currently in three different groups, and it always gets crazy around the holidays."

But Walters said he'd rather be doing nothing else. "I'm a musician, that's the long and short of it. That's just part of what we do."