

Mustang musicians play for patrons pleasure

By Elane Blanchet

Stepping out high and proud during the halftime Homecoming show this Friday will be 40 marching members of Heppner High School's first class band.

Fans are familiar with the school musicians' spirited brand of music as it adds to the general excitement of Mustang games. The halftime show will be their highlight of the football season.

Marching with his students will be Jim Ackley, the man whose consistent hard work and dedication over the last four years has formed the character and quality of the band as it exists today.

Numbering 46 at full strength, the band faces a demanding agenda for the rest of the school year. An exchange concert with Weston-McEwen High School is planned for the middle of November, followed by the annual Christmas concert in December.

Later in the year, Heppner's young musicians will compete in the annual band contest to be held at BMCC, and will perform at the Tri-County Band Festival. A pops concert is planned in the spring and then, as a finale, the end-of-year concert.

Ackley mentioned they might take another shot at an outdoor concert, which was rained out last year. The band is also trying to set up a three day performing tour to the Coast.

Ackley said that he had several goals in sight for the band this year. The first is to spend more time on improving individual playing instead of total concentration on the band as a whole, with soloists and ensembles as an end result.

Another priority is to obtain uniforms for his student musicians through community donations. The band will follow up on a suggestion to put containers around town for residents who would like to contribute to the cause.

A final goal is to improve on last year's rating in district band competition. The band is shooting for a top mark of one this year after receiving a not so shabby one minus last year.

Since Ackley began teaching in Heppner in the fall of 1973, band membership has doubled. He also instructs grade and junior high school

band and his first batch of 5th graders have grown into freshmen band members this year.

Ackley was a senior at Portland State University when he was hired for the Heppner position. Coincidentally, he played with his rock-and-roll band, the 13th Story, at the prom here on the same day he was interviewed for his present job.

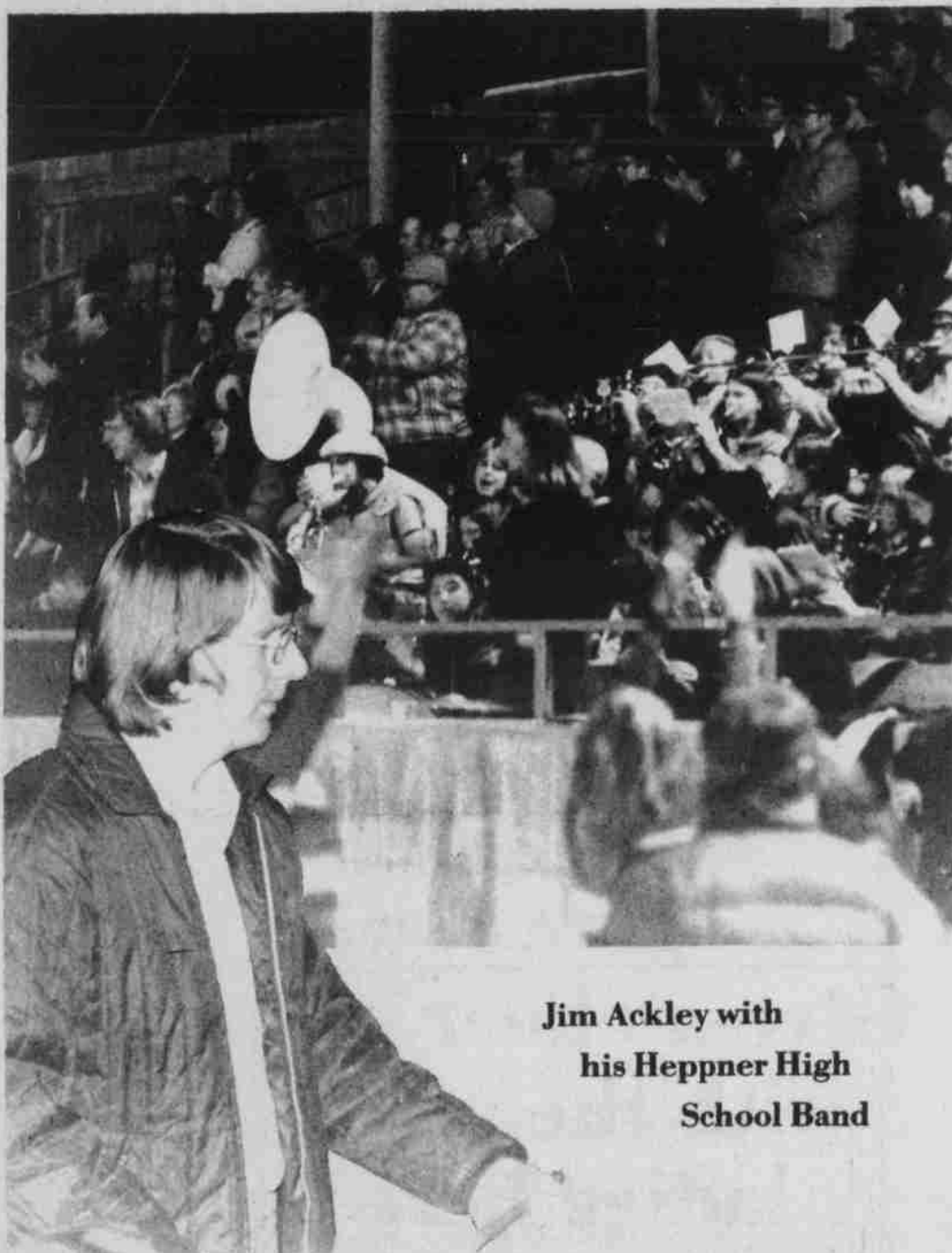
"I wanted a place where I could have control of the entire school band program," Ackley explained as one reason for accepting the Heppner post. He also mentioned that he liked small towns, having grown up in the country near Mulino, Oregon.

Ackley began playing the piano at age seven. He now includes guitar, clarinet and saxophone in his repertoire of instruments. "I just diddle around on the rest", he commented.

Termed a "workaholic" by some friends, Ackley is 8th grade basketball coach and an organizer of the junior bowling and basketball leagues in addition to his band activities.


Ackley has an upholstery shop set up in his basement and says he writes music and watches TV in his 'spare' time.

One philosophy Ackley tries to get across to his students is responsibility to others. "I tell my kids, 'Be responsible because you're going to put someone else in trouble if you aren't.'"



Jim Ackley with his Heppner High School Band

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