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Local Residents Instrumental in Supporting Marching Band

By Cathy Tyson



Colleen McCormick and John Quell in Lamorinda Music's repair room with a vintage sousaphone that needs work. Photo C. Tyson

Colleen and John McCormick know a thing or two about marching bands. They met as members of the Cal marching band and have two children who have enjoyed music and have also played in their college marching bands. As owners of Lamorinda Music on Lafayette Circle, they reached out to help the Richmond High School band by offering the services of John Quell, their talented instrument repair technician, and also by donating some gently used instruments to the school.

Quell is working hard to get a quick turn around on Richmond High's vintage instruments, collecting them on Saturday and trying to get them back to school on Monday so the students will have something to play. These instruments have clearly seen better days: they are so old that finding replacement parts is a real challenge; and they need to be disassembled and put through an ultrasonic cleaner to bring them back to life.

The McCormicks got wind of the situation by crowdfunding site Bring the Music Back, and the fundraising request by community organizer Cesar Zepeda, who was principal for a day at Richmond High and learned that the after-school band class didn't have nearly enough instruments for all the students.

An anonymous donor who walked into the Lamorinda Music shop figured the crowdfunding site was never going to be able to provide funding for all the flutes, clarinets, oboes, tubas and more, so the fellow, who Colleen McCormick describes as an attorney, not a musician, but "quite the character," made a \$76,000 donation.

Due to his generosity 44 instruments have been ordered and 42 have been delivered; two bassoons will be arriving soon from the Midwest.

Current students will not only get to use the instruments, but now with the help of Quell - the fixer - scores of students will use them for many years to come.

The independent business provided a pass through, McCormick explains. They buy the instruments at cost, then she and her husband load up their cars to deliver them to the school. Students are absolutely thrilled with the new instruments and Richmond High band director Andy Wilke wants to share the wealth with neighboring Kennedy High School.

Kennedy High's third band director in three years, instructor Robert Alfaro, has his work cut out for him. When he arrived in the fall, he found only 12 playable instruments for the over 40 students enrolled in the class, so some students resorted to playing snare drum on buckets with drumsticks.

"I have met many students that want and deserve a quality music program here at Kennedy, so it is my responsibility to provide what I can to the best of my ability," said Alfaro. "My piano lab is in full swing; my guitar classes have many once-failing students that are thriving in my class, and

consequently others, too." Alfaro's goal is to equip a marching and a concert band, so those students could travel and perform.

"For now, if I can just get a couple sousaphones and mellophones, we can at least play in the stands next football season, and come back indoors as we are this year. While a marching band is certainly in Kennedy's future, I also have a jazz band in my three to five year plan, and some new saxophones would certainly help to ensure that," said Alfaro. (See the specific wish list of instruments below that, with proper maintenance, should last for at least 20 years.)

So, Lamorinda Music has now offered to pitch in for Kennedy High School as well.

Residents can bring used musical instruments to the shop, where they will be refurbished and donated to the school. The shop, located at 81 Lafayette Circle, just past American Kitchen restaurant in Lafayette, is open Monday through Saturday. For information, call (925) 385-0963.

Instrument Wish List for Kennendy High School

Marching Band instruments needed:

- 2 sousaphones
- 2 mellophones, also known as marching French horns
- 2 marching baritone horns
- 2 4-valve euphoniums
- 1 piccolo

Concert Band instruments needed:

- 2 oboes
- 2 bassoons
- 1 bass clarinet
- 1 double B-flat tuba
- 2 double (F/Bb) French horns
- 2 4-valve euphoniums
- 1 tenor, 1 baritone, 1 alto saxophone

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