

# Director mixes humor, tough standards to make beautiful music

Wednesday, August 22, 2007 1:15 PM EDT

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Afternoon practice has hit a rough patch for the Spirit of McIntosh Marching Band, but band director Barbara Baker softened her criticism with a bit of humor.

"Now hold on four. Get your music and write 'HOLD' on it in big elementary school letters," she told her musicians. "Even symphony players who make \$8 million a year will write on their music."

"Do they make that much money?" a young voice inquires.

"Oh, they're just rolling in it," Ms. Baker responded with a wry smile, as the students joined her in laughter. After a couple more tries, the passage was performed to her satisfaction, and the band moved on, getting ready for marching season.

Ms. Baker's good humor is just one of the qualities her students love about her. Now entering her 10th year as director of the band program at McIntosh High, her push for excellence has led her students to honors in competition, and she has seen many of her students go on to careers in music.

Around 210 students are enrolled in Ms. Baker's classes this fall. She directs four performing concert bands in addition to the marching band. About 90 student musicians have volunteered to perform with the marching band this year.

Preparations have been hampered by the extreme heat this month, with school system regulations banning them from taking the field until after 7 p.m. Practices in the auditorium just aren't the same, but Ms. Baker is taking a philosophical view of the situation.

"It is what it is," she noted. "Everyone else is suffering under the same restrictions. It's not just us."



While halftime performances at football games are what the bands are traditionally known for, competitions are the main focus. This year, the Spirit of McIntosh will participate in three.

The show is "One Thousand and One Arabian Nights," featuring an Arabian theme and music from Nikolai Rimsky Korsakov's "Scheherazade."

Last year's show was based on the movie "Antz," and Ms. Baker said she wanted something more serious this year.

"We want to challenge the students and also give them some variety during their four years of marching band," she said.

Marching band performances have changed a lot over the years. Ms. Baker said a show used to have 10 to 20 pictures-patterns on the field-but now it's more like 80 to 100 for a seven-and-a-half to 12-minute performance.

"We ask a lot from these students, and it's exciting to me how many participate in marching band when there are so many other things they could be doing," she said.

A native of Alabama, Ms. Baker said she was interested in music and history in high school and by the time she entered Jacksonville State University, she knew she wanted to be a teacher but was torn between the two subjects. She said she decided on music as her field because she earned a scholarship in music, and she has not regretted her decision.

Before coming to McIntosh she taught in Alabama and in Cobb County.

The clarinet is her main instrument, and she performs with the Cobb Wind Symphony. But she can make music on every instrument. "I can play everything at a fifth-grade band level," she said.

Ms. Baker, who lives in Fayette, describes McIntosh as being like a family, a feeling her band parents echo.

Tia Boyce, president of the Spirit of McIntosh Band Boosters, praised Ms. Baker's abilities. "She has high expectations of the students. She expects them to work hard and encourages them to be their best, not only in band, but in everything they do. She is a mentor and friend to the students and parents of the band. It's through her devotion and dedication that the MHS bands have achieved success."

The Spirit of McIntosh will take the field Friday night at a scrimmage game with Osborne High in Cobb County. The regular football season will begin Aug. 31 against county rival Sandy Creek.

The Spirit of McIntosh will have put in about 200 hours of practice time by then, Ms. Baker estimated.