

Directors hope donations help strike up their band

By Eileen Daday | Daily Herald Columnist

Published: 10/10/2007 12:01 AM

Band classes started last month at Holmes Middle School in Wheeling, but the turnout for beginning band was at an all-time low, reports one of the school's directors, Bryan Itzkowitz.

A total of 49 beginning band students came out, down from 80 the year before.

"It's the lowest recruitment we've had in a long time," Itzkowitz says.

And he thinks he knows why: the added expense.

At a school where more than half of the students qualify for subsidized lunches, their parents hardly can afford the extra costs of renting an instrument, let alone private lessons.

Yet, all students would benefit from learning to read music, and play an instrument, Itzkowitz counters.

He points to a study by Northwestern University researchers, published last spring in the April issue of Nature Neuroscience. In it they maintain that playing a musical instrument significantly enhances the brainstem's sensitivity to sounds -- and by extension, can improve reading and learning.

All of which makes Itzkowitz, and his fellow band director Jeremy Budrow, determined to see their band sponsorship program succeed.

Last year they developed a flier that appealed to local businesses and individuals to donate funds -- as well as used instruments -- to the school's band program. They received both, to the tune of \$7,000 and 20 donated instruments.

With their funds, they purchased four new instruments, including a baritone saxophone, vibraphone, tuba and bass clarinet.

Already this year, they received a \$1,000 check through an educational grant from Target, as well as \$700 so far from local businesses, all of which they plan to devote to private lessons for interested students.

If they get enough donations, they'd like to purchase more instruments, including another tuba, bassoon and a set of chimes for the band room.

"Typically when people clean out closets, they have more of the beginning instruments to donate, like trumpets, clarinets, flutes and saxophones," Itzkowitz says. "We're hoping to purchase some of the more advanced instruments, as well."

Itzkowitz himself is a product of the local band programs. He first learned to play saxophone at Cooper Middle School in Buffalo Grove, leading him to play in all of the music ensembles at Buffalo Grove High School, and even in the Marching Illini at the University of Illinois.

He counts among its benefits, a sense of teamwork and the ability to work with others, as well as

leadership, as students strive to become section leaders.

To learn more about the band program at Holmes Middle School, visit: www.hmsbands.org, or simply mail a check to Holmes Middle School bands, 221 S. Wolf Road, Wheeling, IL 60090.