

# The gift of music

**Eileen O. Daday's good news**

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When Bryan Itzkowitz, 23, accepted a job as one of two band directors at Holmes Middle School in Wheeling, he was filled with big ideas on how to instill a love of music in his students.

Not so many years ago, he himself was a young musician — attending nearby Cooper Middle School in Buffalo Grove where he learned to play the saxophone. He later played in all the music ensembles at Buffalo Grove High School, and even the Marching Illini at the University of Illinois.

Still, a major obstacle stood in the young teacher's way: many of his preteen students came from low-income families whose parents could not afford to rent their instruments.

"At our Beginning Band Registration Night we had about 100 people turn out, and of those 70 left with instruments," Itzkowitz said. "But what I found last year is that after the four-month trial period ended, and the rental price went up, the parents decided they couldn't afford it anymore."

All of which prompted Itzkowitz and fellow director Jeremy Budrow to start the Holmes Middle School Band Sponsorship program this year. They designed a flier that appealed to local businesses and individuals to donate funds "to help put more instruments in children's hands."

Specifically, they asked for donations to help the school purchase instruments that students then could rent for a nominal fee. The pair also asked for donations of used instruments.

"The response has been overwhelmingly great," Itzkowitz said.

In the first six weeks alone, the band program drew donations totaling \$3,300. Many of the contributions came from small local businesses, including Tips 2 Toes, Subway, Pico de Gallo, Olivia's Beauty Salon, America's Car Wash, AMVETS Post 66, and Mark Drug Medical Supply, all in Wheeling.

The pair also received 15 used instruments, which they are having refurbished.

Itzkowitz said that with the donations, the band plans to purchase a tuba, baritone saxophone, bassoon, vibraphone (percussion instrument much like a xylophone) and a bass clarinet.

In the flier, Itzkowitz points to research showing the link between studying music and academic achievement.

"There's many connections between music and math," he said, "But it's also like learning a new language, so it stimulates their cognitive abilities."

What's more, Itzkowitz believes being in the band promotes teamwork and a sense of

working with others, as well as leadership, as the young musicians strive to become section leaders.

They also make beautiful music together. Come hear them at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday when the sixth-grade band performs a Latin "Salsa and Chips," followed by a ballad called "A Western Legend," and finishes off with a rousing "Fighting Falcon March" in the school's gym.

Those wishing to donate to the band sponsorship program, should mail a check to Holmes Middle School Bands, 221 S. Wolf Road, Wheeling, IL, 60090. They also seek more instruments, for anyone looking to clean out closets. Itzkowitz reports that all 15 instruments donated so far are being used by beginning fifth-graders enrolled in band.