

Winds of change

The Robert O. Briggs Memorial Festival Concert

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In the early morning of Feb. 15, **BILL DOHERTY**, an affable man who recently inherited the title of **SOLANO WINDS COMMUNITY CONCERT BAND** director, arrived at the back doors of the Fairfield Center for Creative Arts with his family and band members to unload equipment for the evening's concert.

He had been through these doors many times before, performing with the concert ensemble under the direction of **ROBERT O. BRIGGS**. But today was different. Doherty was one of 10 conductors leading a group of 115 musicians from throughout the U.S. for the Robert O. Briggs Memorial Festival Concert, an event to honor the late Briggs, who died in fall 2008.

But the evening's concert was more than homage to Briggs, a revered conductor whose career in music spanned more than six decades. It was also a way to support his philanthropic commitment to aspiring musicians.

The idea stemmed from a run Doherty took months ago to help ease his mind from the loss of his good friend. Details for an event emerged with each step, an idea to create a concert with musicians who were in one way or another taught, led or supported by Briggs throughout his career. By the end of his jog, Doherty recalled, the blueprint for the Memorial Festival Concert had materialized.



ROBERT O. BRIGGS.
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COMMUNITY
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“I knew we needed to do something for Bob and thought of incorporating parts of his life with music,” he says. “And I knew this needed to be a benefit for his scholarship fund. We needed to carry that on for him.”

Five years ago, Briggs, a long-time director of the University of California, Berkeley Marching Band who also taught at Armijo High School in Fairfield, approached the Solano Community Foundation to create a scholarship fund for students pursuing careers in instrumental music. To date, he has awarded \$2,800 to five different students. And thanks to Doherty, Solano Winds and the community, his legend and influence will continue.

“We’re helping to carry on his legacy because it’s important to us. The scholarship is giving other people a chance to move on and that’s how Bob did things. It was never about him; it was about Bob giving other people a chance to learn from him,” Doherty says. All proceeds from the concert benefited the fund.

By 11:30 a.m. on the day of the performance, musicians began to filter through the halls of the center, each receiving packets filled with music, schedules and other pertinent information. At 1 p.m., with all 115 musicians seated and ready to rehearse together for the first time, the four-and-a-half-hour practice began.

“This was a great rehearsal atmosphere. Each conductor gave us insight on how they wanted the music to sound. I sat next to people I didn’t even know and still there was good camaraderie among the band members,” says 65-year-old Jim Tutt, member of the Solano Winds board who has been playing since he was 16 years old. “I knew Bob was with us that night. His presence was everywhere.”

As the hours passed, with musicians representing different bands, including one member from Canada, and the theater filled nearly to capacity, Doherty knew they had something special.

Perhaps it was the surge of energy that enveloped the room, with people who had not seen each other for years playing in harmony, their instruments sounding with one voice. Or maybe it was watching seasoned teachers playing side-by-side with their former students of decades ago. Regardless of the reason, a unique moment was taking place, and a collaboration of musical minds began to flow through the theater.

Briggs once said in an interview that he created the scholarship fund because he wanted it to be something that goes on in perpetuity. And, he added, "I hope it's a motivator." If the concert was a testament to how many people Briggs has already inspired, no doubt, his wishes and legacy will live on.