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'Mr. B' taught for 4 decades

By Justin Mason

Mohonasen names wing after music instructor



Longtime music teacher and director David G. Bournazian reacts as he enters a recognition ceremony during which the music wing of Mohonasen High School was dedicated in his name in Rotterdam on Monday.

ROTTERDAM — In the words of 'Mr. B,' attitude is the key to success.

For nearly 41 years at Mohonasen's music department, David Bournazian's attitude seemed to drive his students to success. During his tenure at the district, he had an uncanny knack for teaching students without an innate musical ability and an even greater propensity for empowering those with natural talent.

The end result was a Mohonasen music program and marching band that is now nationally renowned. Bournazian's accolades at the district are too many to list, something readily apparent by the treasure trove of trophies accrued under his leadership that now sit atop the instrument lockers in the high school's band room.

"And this is just the overflow, the ones that don't fit into the trophy cases," said Keith Bushey, who took over as director of the band after Bournazian retired in 2004. "The true representation of his dedication is the number of lives he's touched."

Bournazian, who is affectionately referred to as 'Mr. B' or simply 'B,' was honored Monday when the district named the music wing in his honor. In the coming weeks, the wing will be named 'Bournazian Way' and have a new display of the various honors secured under his leadership.

"This is just a small token for what you've done for us," said Gary Spadaro, the vice president of Mohonasen's Board of Education, who once played in the band under Bournazian.

Bournazian was a saxophone player who aspired to live a musician's life during his adolescence. He joined the U.S. Army after World War II, was stationed in New Orleans and found himself heavily influenced by the Big Easy's omnipresent jazz beats.

When his service ended, Bournazian used the GI bill to start his education at Boston University. He left college to join composer Neal Hefti's big band, but decided to return after living life on the road for a while.

"I realized you can't make a living otherwise," he said.

Bournazian started his career in Pittsfield, Mass., in 1954. Ten years later, a friend told him about a position that was opening at Mohonasen's music department. At the time, the district was relatively young and growing. When Bournazian arrived, he decided to take the marching band under his wing.

Under Bournazian's leadership, the program flourished. His effort seemed to rub off on parents too—they established a booster organization to help raise funds for the marching band while he was the director.

Bournazian was a tireless advocate for his programs with the Board of Education as well. He persistently appealed for funding to support the band's efforts, which carried them from interstate competitions to a memorable performance during the Olympic torch-lighting ceremony at Rockefeller Plaza in New York City in 1980.

But Bournazian's true magic was in his ability to reach students. Even the ones who seemed beyond hope, recalled Paul Peregrim, who taught under Bournazian for 25 years.

"Just before they'd get to the edge, B would grab them by the collar and pull them back and say to the young man or young lady, 'this is what you have got to do,' " he recalled.

Though retired now, Bournazian's talent is still called into service. Today, he's rehearsing with the Excelsior Drum and Bugle

Corps in Troy.

"It gets into your blood," he said of his love for music. "Once you get involved, you never lose it."