

Anyone can fit in this band

The author, John Woodford, is a member of the Washtenaw Community Concert Band, which formed in 1979 as the Ypsilanti Community Band. For more about its history and programs, visit WCCBand.org.

Hannah Butler was ferrying two members of the Washtenaw Community Concert Band in a golf cart across a muddy field to a band shell where they were about to perform. She told them she used to play French horn and, well

Chief Judge Joseph F. Burke of Michigan's 15th Judicial District Court in Ann Arbor was an assistant prosecuting attorney in Washtenaw County when he saw a newspaper ad for a used trumpet. Then in his mid-30s, he'd stopped playing about two decades earlier, but he bought that trumpet and, well

Well, both Butler and Burke are now members of the 80-person WCCB, which is preparing for a big concert, "A Portrait of Sousa," honoring the great bandmaster/composer John Phillip Sousa at 2 p.m. Sunday, May 22, at the Michigan Theater. And both say the band offered itself to them in a way they couldn't refuse.

Butler recalls her chance encounter almost two years back: "When I told my passengers I used to play the French horn and missed it, they encouraged me to pick it up again." They emphasized that WCCB was a community organization that offers free concerts and "invites any interested player to join, no audition required."

Butler attended a WCCB practice and decided she "really liked the conducting style of Chris Heidenreich," WCCB music director and conductor,



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who is an associate professor at the University of Michigan-Flint, where he also is director of bands. "I also like the fact that the band is based on communal feeling and not competition," she said.

So she uncased her French horn after almost 10 years. That was "as easy as getting back on a bike" for the Temperance native, because she'd studied music at both the University of Toledo and Eastern Michigan University before dropping out in 2005 to learn to be a makeup artist. She and her sisters Julie, a hairstylist, and Whitney, a photographer, began operating a bridal studio by appointment in 2008. Last November, they opened their full-service salon, Imagine Three Beauty Studio in Ann Arbor.

Now she's trying to convince one of her shop's hairstylists to resume playing the trombone, dual lip piercings and all: "I told her there's every kind of person in our band, all ages, jobs and interests. Anyone can fit in."

Like many WCCB members, Burke was a lapsed player much longer than Butler. More than a few laid their instruments aside in high school and took them up again only after

retirement some 50 years later. Burke put aside his trumpet as a ninth-grader in Howell after two years of playing. "Despite strong encouragement from our band director, I quit band to play football," he recalls.

After buying the trumpet in that ad 20 years ago, Burke "began practicing and took lessons arranged by Dave Juliet of Ann Arbor Music. Six months into my lessons, my teacher told me I would improve only if I played music with others. He gave me two numbers, the WCCB's, which was then known as the Ypsilanti Community Band, and another local band's. Our band was very welcoming; the other band was not."

Burke, who went on to serve WCCB as president, among other offices, emphasizes that the band "doesn't exist only to provide a place for grown-ups to play together." Band members "work in and with our local community to provide free concerts and post-concert receptions so that people can come and enjoy some time with family and friends while being entertained by concert band music.

"We also provide support and encouragement to junior high and high school band musicians by awarding a yearly scholarship to the Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp. It's named for Ken Bowman, a former band-directing legend in the Lincoln School District. Also, for the past two years, thanks to the largess of the Rislov Foundation, we have sponsored a concerto competition that awards \$2,000 to the winning high school musician. This year's winner, Jonathan Lynn of Pioneer High, performed a saxophone concerto with our band at our March concert."