

Teachers

Continued from Page 1A

Their final concerts were bittersweet, much like the jobs they are leaving behind. They know they have made a difference in the lives of thousands of students. But they grieve the slow decline of the music programs from budget cuts, a shift in educational priorities and a culture that emphasizes immediacy at the cost of quality.

"All three of us are frustrated. We're concerned," Zwack said.

Part of the challenge music directors face is the increasing focus on testing and proficiency, which goes against what music is really about — the human element.

"They are looking for all these measurable things. Quantitative. I can stack it. I can count it," Zwack said. "And music doesn't do that. We serve an entirely different function. In doing so, we incorporate the entire brain and being. And unfortunately, the bean counters don't understand that."

Zwack has been teaching for 37 years — with four years at Cathedral High School before he came to Tech in 1990. Campbell has been at Sauk Rapids-Rice for 28 years. And Brady has been at Apollo for 20 years after 15 at Cathedral.

They also perform with Central Minnesota groups. Zwack directs the Meire Grove Band, Brady is a member of the St. Cloud Symphony Orchestra and Campbell plays with a family brass group.

The three retiring directors sat down with the Times in early May to look back at their storied careers as they reflected on what's been good, what's changed for the worse and what's to come.

'It's about how to be human'

One of the most rewarding parts about teaching music is cultivating passion in students.

"It's almost like sometimes in academic areas, kids have to be who others want them to be. You have to reach this goal. You have to obtain this level of proficiency," Campbell said. "In our music areas, they get to be who they want to be."

For all three directors, students have made known the impact of music classes.

"It is definitely family. The kids will say that. (It's) that camaraderie, that feeling of belonging. It's a place to go. It's not just (that) we're learning about music. It's that for this period, I can have this release from the tensions and stress of other periods," Brady said. "It's engaging them in a system in a whole different way. I think we all can say that there are students that we have that say, 'This is the reason I continue to come to school.'"

Students have also told them if it weren't for band, they wouldn't be here. Music has taught students how to appreciate life. For some, it has saved their lives.

"That's what it's about," Zwack said.

Music often creates a lifelong appreciation for the arts, whether the student becomes a professional musician or music teacher. It also requires students to work together — to be in tune, follow the same tempo and help each other improve.

"It's about how to be human," Brady said. "It's how to interact peacefully with other people, to be able to work with other people despite their differences."

Looking back on their careers, Zwack, Campbell and Brady agree the most gratifying part of teaching isn't a singular accomplishment. Instead, it's the little moments.



Gary Zwack, who has been band director at Technical High School since 1990, takes a bow at his final concert on May 6 at Tech. Zwack is retiring at the end of the year. JENNY BERG/ST. CLOUD TIMES

"For me, it's just the daily challenge of trying to get a concept across, get an idea across, make a connection," Zwack said. "It's fun to watch them celebrate that, too. Maybe it's just playing in tune."

For Campbell, it's those a-ha moments when students take a concept and grow a bit each day, which is why early one-on-one lessons are so crucial to learning to play an instrument.

"The primary task for us as music teachers is to teach hope, to teach kids that tomorrow is going to be better than today, that the next time you pick up your instrument you're going to be a better musician than you were the previous time," Campbell said. "And that no matter how bad the world gets, you've always got something like music that you can turn to to console yourself or find a moment of peace or calm."

"If we don't have it in us to push that sense of hope," Campbell warned, "then all of a sudden you see burnout and you will see a lot less people making it as long as we have."

'We live in a microwave society'

While technology has transformed education in most academic areas, it hasn't greatly changed how students learn to play instruments: Students still need to dedicate a small period of time each day to master an instrument.

How technology has affected music is in the way it has changed society and the students themselves.

"The challenge that we have as teachers now is that the kids come out of the birthing room with something in their hands," Zwack said of devices such as phones, tablets and gaming systems. "They don't understand the discipline it takes to learn a musical instrument."

While children can quickly master a new game or task on an electronic device, the skills do not transfer to something tactile such as learning an instrument.

"The attention span is very short, and we have to teach quite differently," Brady said. "I don't know where I've heard this, but we live in a microwave society and what we do is more of a slow cooker."

How people use and prioritize their

time has also changed during the directors' careers. Compared to 30 years ago, students have more options for after-school activities. And that's good — to a point.

"(People) do more. They try to get more done, and, in the process of doing that, they lose the opportunity for creative thinking, creative action, creative play," Campbell said.

While these changes haven't decreased participation at area schools, they have strained relationships and stretched thin the director's time. In a perfect system, the director stays with the students for much of their music career. That continuity is important for learning and retention of students.

"Ideally, you are going to have that kid in your class for four years," Zwack said. "It's something that we strive for. It doesn't always work."

In St. Cloud schools, the demographics have drastically changed over the past decade. But the demographics of the bands do not reflect the schools' demographics. Often, it's because students such as Somali students would like to try an instrument but find it difficult to catch up to other students who might have started earlier.

The district provides opportunities to learn about music in other ways, which Zwack applauds. But the district generally isn't giving the music department more resources to do so, he said.

"They many times are putting that on the back of the current people doing the instrumental programs," he said. "At some point, then, something gives. And that's been lessons, particularly at the younger levels."

The reduction in one-on-one or small-group time in the elementary and middle grades has affected bands all the way to the top — even the students in the highest level of band, the wind ensemble.

"At the high school level, it's frustrating because I can't play the same level of music that I did five years ago with my kids," Zwack said. "I'm down at least one full grade level."

Zwack concedes it's not all doom and gloom. Students still get the brain benefits of playing an instrument. Students still learn how to work together as a group. Students still make memories.

Zwack said he asked students what they remembered most about marching band — and he was surprised to learn it wasn't the new uniforms or the catchy music.

"It was the bus ride. It was hanging out at camp. It was hanging out on the playground before the parade. It was the social element. It becomes a family," he said.

"It wasn't that we won a trophy. That was nice, but it wasn't the thing."

Longtime directors hand over the reins

Zwack directed the marching band, now called Solar Sound, for 21 years.

Last year was his last at the helm of the band, which is made up of students in grades 7-12 from across the region. He decided this year was the right time to retire from teaching, too.

"For me, too, the question is, why aren't you going to the new school? It was a draw but at the same time, what a great opportunity for someone to start a program, too," Zwack said.

Next year, North Junior High band director Jessica Scherer will move into Zwack's position at Tech.

Aurora Adamson, orchestra teacher at Kennedy Community School, will move to Apollo. And Richard Owen, music teacher at Luverne Public School District, will move into Campbell's role.

As they hand over the reins to new directors, Zwack, Campbell and Brady worry about the music departments being whittled away.

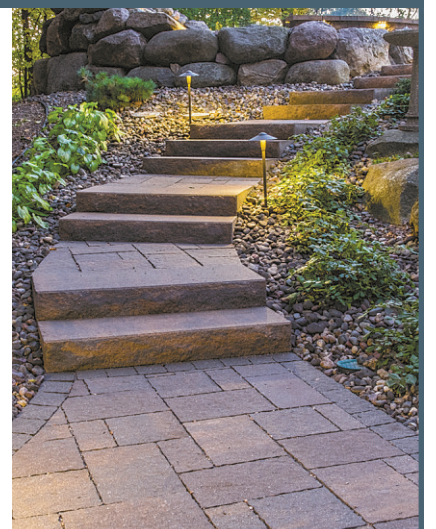
Next year, the St. Cloud school district is restructuring orchestra programming at the elementary and middle levels, similar to changes made to band programming in recent years.

Zwack said the changes include more regular programming at the middle levels instead of programs at the elementary level that pulls students out of class for lessons.

"Leaving and seeing the district cut the fifth-grade orchestra program I'm sad, very sad, because you think you've done your part and you can leave and (the program) should have this life that somebody can come and take," Brady said, "but when they make that cut, that's going to affect the progress."

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC!

CLEARANCE ITEMS AT A SUBSTANTIAL DISCOUNT! COME SEE WHAT WE HAVE TO OFFER.



B **BORGERT**
PAVERS | SLABS | WALLS | EST. 1923

CALL FOR A LOCAL CONTRACTOR

CELEBRATING OVER 95 YEARS OF EXCELLENCE!

Borgert offers a variety of products for the do-it-yourselfer, complete with instructions!

Your vision, brought to life.

VISIT OUR SHOWROOM TODAY: 8646 Ridgewood Rd., St. Joseph, MN 56374 | For more information or for a FREE Borgert catalog call 320.363.4671 | borgertproducts.com