



Everything New Orleans

## Gretna Middle School band receives new instruments from Mr. Holland's Opus Foundation

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By **Helen Williams, Gretna Columnist**

Through the leadership of band director Cheryl Fryer, the Gretna Middle School band has grown to include 110 students and has acquired a decent instrument inventory. "In order to be in the band, students must have an instrument, so some students obtain their own, but most don't have the means," Fryer said. "A couple of instruments were donated by local people who read Times-Picayune articles about our shortage of instruments."



New York high school student David Jaffin had an instrument drive and received some used instruments that he offered to the Mr. Holland's Opus Foundation to donate to a New Orleans area school. The Gretna Middle School band was the recipient of 10 badly needed instruments. Jaffin, a trumpet player, and his parents visited the school. From left are Erick Maravilla-Menjiva, Amanda Valencia, Jaffin and Michael Billiot.

The school inventory was boosted with 11 instruments through the Mr. Holland's Opus Foundation grant — six new Yamaha flutes and five new Yamaha trombones.

Hearing from the foundation is exciting for any school band director because it could mean that help is on the way with needed instruments. The Mr. Holland's Opus Foundation keeps music alive in schools by donating musical instruments to under-funded music programs, giving youngsters the benefits of music education.

The foundation's mantra is that kids thrive when given the chance to learn and play music; that putting an instrument into their hands improves the quality of their education and their lives. .

David Jaffin, a ninth-grader from New York, began to play a role in the GMS search for needed instruments when Fryer received an email last spring from foundation programs assistant

DeAnna Sanchez.

"The foundation had a donor that had recently held an instrument drive and had received several used instruments. The donor wanted to donate to a New Orleans area school," Fryer said. "Since MHOF orchestrated this, the instruments carry all the stipulations that MHOF places on the instruments they donate."

The GMS band was offered two flutes, four clarinets, two trombones, a baritone, a French horn and two violins, all in working order. All had been looked at by a vendor in the New Orleans area that did minor repair and maintenance to the instruments.

Fryer was over the moon.

"Wow this is great," she replied by email. "YES, we would love to have all of the instruments except the violins. We don't have a string program of any kind, so they will be better going to another school. Thank you so much. I have many students who will be thrilled to use these instruments!"

The instruments were brought to the school in the summer by a technician at Hoffman Music in Thibodaux who had made needed repairs.

"One day we got quite a surprise in the band room. About 11 a.m. the phone rang and it was Roberta Jaffin, the mom of David who had donated the 10 instruments to us. The Jaffins were in New Orleans. Mom, dad and David came by for a quick visit and the band kids were thrilled," Fryer said.

"During the visit, David indicated that he had been doing the instrument drive since he was 12. Following Hurricane Katrina he has donated between 150 to 200 instruments to greater New Orleans area schools." Fryer said.

"David is himself a trumpet player. While he was here, our students were able to ask him questions and interact with him which was wonderful. We were even able to get some pictures of his visit."

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