



From the Prez...

Volume 7 • Issue 5 • May 2026

Antonio Trujillo ~ President, Board of Directors.

We have finished yet another successful Spring Concert Series and I think it was one we can be proud of. Special congratulations go out to Dr. Jesse Leyva who conducted his first concert series with the WCB without a “guest” or “interim” before his conductor title. But, as always, our work is never done. No rest for the weary, as the saying goes.

One of the bright points of our organization, encapsulated in our bylaws and in our normal operating procedures, is support for music in our schools. You may have noticed the absence of our WCB Youth Band during the Spring Concert Series. Fear not, dear readers, for they are not forgotten! We have two concerts coming up in May. The first of which is a joint concert with the Pajaro Valley High School band. During this concert the Youth Band will join us. They will get to not only perform themselves but also get a glimpse of their concert band futures as high school students and as adults when PVHS and WCB perform. Hopefully between the two youth bands we will gain some new recruits down the line.

Our second May concert will be on Memorial Day at Roaring Camp. This has become a new tradition for us. One of the neat things about this performance is it’s one where we go to where the people are so there is a ready-made audience. It’s a different type of experience where people come and go as they please and we get exposure to a bunch of people who wouldn’t necessarily have had the opportunity to hear us perform. It is reminiscent of the concert in the park tradition of many local concert bands back in ye olden times.

As a year-round band we get to play in multiple musical seasons, each of which has a different feel and a different focus. And as we look ahead to our summer season we get ready for more rehearsals, concerts, and add parades (oh my!). So, lots to look forward to and lots to get excited about.



Our History

It's time to get ready! The first parade of the season is just next month - the Saddle Horse Show Parade in Hollister, June 20. Step off is at 11am, and we're very near the front, so don't be late. Before every parade - for 79 years - a bunch of people in brightly colored uniforms have met at a certain time and place and prepared to entertain the public and, in rather distinctive style, let people know that Watsonville has a band! That preparation takes many forms: quiet reflection, excited conversation, extensive warmup, very little warmup, frantic hurry-up so as not to be late, and last minute study of "memorized" music. Here's a glimpse behind the scenes of parade prep.

See you in Hollister!

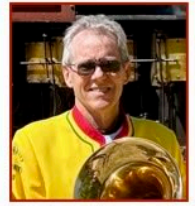




An Interview with Eugene Smith,

Conductor Emeritus, French Horn, Newsletter Editor

By Bob Graves ~ Euphonium



Bob: You've made a lifelong career around playing and teaching music - how did it all start and how did it evolve?

Gene: When I was a high school freshman my band director had been teaching at Watsonville High for 33 years, and he was tired. As a result, we didn't do much under his direction. When I was a senior we got a new director, a young guy fresh out of San Jose State, and he was excited. He opened up a whole new world of high school music to me. I was one of his student leaders and got to see the building of a program from the inside. As we began to do new things I came to feel cheated - we'd missed so much! (I can still remember the spot in the Watsonville High School (WHS) band room where I was when I decided to become a music teacher, and where I vowed to myself that my students would never feel cheated.) My path then led to San Jose State, the Santa Clara Vanguard Drum & Bugle Corps, the Watsonville Community Band, and the classroom.

Bob: When did you join the WCB and how did you learn about it?

Gene: When I was a sophomore at WHS several of my friends in the band had joined the "City Band," as we called it, and invited me to a concert in the Vet's Hall. I sat in the front row, and when they played *Semper Fidelis* it about blew my socks off! I'd never heard a sound like that! It was the fall of 1966, and I couldn't wait to join the band!

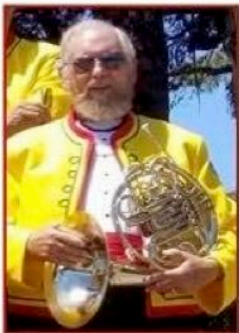
Bob: At some point you moved and now live a four-hour drive from Watsonville. Why are you still with us?

Gene: I retired as conductor with the band when I retired from teaching. My wife, Kathy, and I had moved to the Sierra foothills near Mountain Ranch in Calaveras County and I felt that I couldn't be effective while living 4 hours away. I soon located 3 local community bands - up in the hills if it's only an hour's drive away it's still local - and I tried out two of them. One was a very small, a somewhat struggling, seasonal band, and the other a band of about 40 musicians who, pound for pound, were at that time probably better individual musicians than in the Watsonville Band. Yet, musically and organizationally, they didn't really compare to us. The band just didn't feel like a family. Most bands don't, I realized, so I started driving to Watsonville. I could only make it every other week, which then Conductor Brad Gronroos allowed, so I was golden! That was eight years ago, and in that time, I've only missed one performance - Veterans Day 2024. I was sick as a dog!

Bob: You wear several different hats with the band - most notably as our newsletter editor and conductor emeritus. What can you tell us about these and other contributions you've made over the years?

Gene: The band's previous organization was run by two guys, Band Manager Ed Pio, and Conductor Bert Viales. Bert handled the music, Ed everything else. Nevertheless, we had an informal board of directors, really an advisory committee, and I was usually a part of that. I enjoyed seeing the workings of the band from the inside. In 1978, shortly after I began teaching, Bert made me his assistant conductor, a post I held for 25 years. Bert didn't miss many gigs, but occasionally I'd get to conduct a rehearsal or performance. Bert retired from the band in 1999, and Mac (Silvester "Mac" McElroy) took over. A couple of years later he asked me to be the drum major. I did that for 10 years. What great fun! There's nothing like the feeling of being in front of our band on the street. Wow!

(Continued on Page 4)



An Interview with Eugene Smith

(Continued from Page 3)

The band reorganized in 2005 and we had a transitional board of directors to plan our new course and structure. I was president during that year. When we officially adopted our current by-laws, I was elected president and served two 2-year terms. Since the by-laws contain term limits, I'll probably be the only 5-year prez we'll ever have!

We've had a newsletter for decades, but never a regular monthly one. When we determined to go monthly, I offered to do it, and it's now in its seventh year. Mostly it's fun to do. Mostly.

Bob: What are your goals for the band - where do you see us heading?

Gene: When I returned to the band I simply played for a year, doing my thing. But then it seemed to me that we'd sort of lost our way. Oh, the music was good, players loved playing, and the audience loved listening, but that "old-time spirit" just wasn't there. So, I ran for the VP spot on the board and used the build-up to the 75th anniversary to address what I viewed as our needs. That, and the year-long 75th celebration provided focus. I felt we got back on track and have remained there since. Now we're gearing up for the 80th and that'll be great fun as well.

I can see us continuing to achieve great things in the future, but I have some concerns. The world has certainly changed since the "old days," and what worked well then doesn't necessarily work now. New ideas are needed. I confess to a lack of "Great Ideas" when it comes to meeting some of these challenges, and I'm so glad that we have people stepping up to give it their try. I'm excited about the directions and ideas of our new Conductor Dr. Jesse Leyva, and I'm really pleased to play under his baton. He works my butt off in rehearsal and I love it!

I do worry that we may lose some of the core principles that have stood us in such good stead for so long: our uniqueness, the integrity of what it means to be a member of the band, the forward-looking attitude and drive to push our organization onward. Voices calling for less and smaller will not keep us growing — we shouldn't give in to restrictions or limits imposed from the outside. I'm concerned that our footprint in the Central Coast is shrinking, that we are in danger of becoming a Santa Cruz County band. That's not who we've ever been. Some years ago there was even discussion about wearing a polo shirt and khaki pants instead of our always distinctive uniforms. WHY ON EARTH would we want to look and be like so many other bands? Why be ordinary when we are - and can remain - unique?

Bob: Are there any band highlights you'd like to share?

Gene: Highlights? Well, in 60 years there have been a lot of them. Certainly, the trips, big and small. You know that unfinished portrait of George Washington that used to hang in every school when we were kids? On the way to the restroom at the White House during our concert intermission I glanced to my right and just stopped dead - there it was! That portrait! By the way - the women in the band told how the White House ladies' room was very fancy, embossed napkins, nice furniture, etc. That's fine, but the men's room was kind of dingy. Not well lighted, walls hadn't been painted in years. Why? Because many of the artists that performed in the White House over the years - decades really! - signed their name on those walls! Incredible to read the names of entertainment giants there!

Bob: Any highlights from your life you'd like to share - whether about music or not.

Gene: Probably the greatest thing for a kid from Watsonville was the expansion of the world that comes from travel and meeting and seeing all kinds of people — from sharing a concert with the band from a small town in Switzerland to playing in the wards of a veterans' hospital to performing at three World's Fairs and the White House. The band gave me opportunities I'd never have had otherwise and provided friends and family that shaped my life. After I moved, I searched long and hard for another band like us - and couldn't find one. What we have is unique and special. We should cherish it.



Music History 202

Antonio Trujillo, Principal Trumpet



In the last article we looked at the early history of American bands from about 1835 to 1859 and now we take a look at life in American bands during the Civil War era circa 1860 – 1865. Regimental bands served many functions during the war. They were used to liven up military parades for their regiments. They entertained the troops during evening performances when the army was on campaign. They also were pressed into more grim service as stretcher bearers or medical assistants during or after battles.

Life in military bands was certainly interesting. Confederate bandmaster W. J. Worsham of the 19th Tennessee regiment noted in Sept. 1861 his regiment received ten instruments for the brass band. Just two months later, he lamented that his Colonel ordered the band to carry their horns *and* their guns. The band did not like this and so stacked up their horns and left them. In Dec. 1862, Worsham observed that the men on opposite sides of the conflict were much the same. During the Battle of Stones River, near Murfreesboro, the bands had finished their evening performance for the men when a Federal band played *Home, Sweet Home*. Soon, a Confederate band took up the tune, and then more, until finally all the bands from both armies were playing it. Worsham describes the men of both armies "...holding communion with his own soul, his mind occupied with the thought of what to-morrow would bring, whether wounds or death, and would he ever see home again..." as the notes of the tune floated across the battlefield.

Not all "battles of the bands" were so harmonious. Union Capt. George Julian related a story from the Battle of Cold Harbor in June 1864 where one evening the band of the 13th New Hampshire regiment went into the trenches at the front to indulge in a friendly competition concert with a band playing behind enemy lines. The rebel band played *Dixie*, *Bonnie Blue Flag*, and *My Maryland* while the Union band countered with *America*, the *Star Spangled Banner*, and *Old John Brown*. Soon thereafter the Confederate band stopped and their artillery let loose with a barrage of grapeshot. Tough critics, indeed. The Federals were not deterred and continued to play vigorously until the shelling stopped.

Another Southerner, Julius Lineback, described how when the war started, he did not want to shirk his duty but also didn't want to get shot at and so was open to other army activities. To wit, he joined the 26th North Carolina regimental band. He described this brass band as being made up of 2 Eb cornets, 1 Bb cornet, 1 Eb alto horn, 2 Bb tenor horns, 1 Bb baritone, and 1 Eb bass. He also described his main duties "were to play every morning for guard mount, every evening at dress parade, give a short concert every night, at regimental inspection on Sunday mornings, and at brigade reviews." Lineback also gave a description of the difficulty learning how to march that many of us would find familiar: "Our natural gaits were very dissimilar, and as our attention must necessarily be given closely to the music, we would sometimes forget our feet, and they would go at their accustomed rate, until one or the other would suddenly discover that he had 'lost a step.'"

Also familiar to us was the lack of funding for bands. Numerous Northern civilian bands enlisted as a whole to serve as regimental bands in the Union army. In 1861, a general order allowed for 24 musicians in each regiment (~1000 men). After early setbacks in the war, this seemed an unwarranted drain on resources and so Congress stepped in and forced Major General George McClellan to issue General Order 151 which eliminated most non-volunteer bands. It also allowed for a band of a mere 16 musicians per brigade (~3000 – 6000 men). One of the bands mustered out was that of Patrick Gilmore which had been serving with the 24th Massachusetts Volunteers. He made the best of it by returning to Boston to perform benefit concerts to raise funds for the benefit of Boston soldiers from six different regiments.

Many town bands popped up around the U.S. during this time and many wrote incorporation documents, elected boards with officers, and kept minutes and financial ledgers. One such band was in Marysville, Ohio. Their "articles of agreement" had striking similarities to our own bylaws. "Believing that there ought to be a Band of Musicians in the town...And that the elevative influence of Music is understood and appreciated...", they proposed to organize a band, "...for the purpose of instrumental music, for the benefit of ourselves and others; the citizens and Community at large." The articles go on to state that the band was bound and obligated to spend a portion of time every week to practice music and further obligated themselves to perform "...for the citizens Who Assist in procuring the instruments, at any time or any occasion when and wherever they may or require Band Music."

Interesting that no matter the era, we can find something about band music that resonates with us.

From the Podium

Dr. Jesse Leyva ~ Conductor

Who Really Wants to Listen to Band Music?

Continuing the "Dash" After 1947 -

"Change is inevitable: growth is an option."

- John C. Maxwell



When you play or attend a band concert, how do you decide if it was good or bad? During my first year as a high school band director in 1999, I took my students to a band festival at the university I had just graduated from a year earlier. My college band director was one of the band festival adjudicators as was *his* teacher. In the months leading up to the festival performance, I was convinced that my high school band was going to “knock the socks off” of my mentor, his teacher, and all of my former classmates still attending CSU, Stanislaus.

After months of selecting a musical program to impress and vigorously rehearsing my students to perform with perfection, we traveled from the Bay Area to the Central Valley to deliver a concert that I was convinced would dazzle all in attendance. We took the stage and delivered a performance that resembled a massive fireworks show, but the kind that is full of duds with the occasional sparkle. My young ego was bruised (to say the least), but I learned a lasting lesson: A successful performance can only be possible if the musical program meets the needs of the performers and the audience, not the ambitions of the conductor.

Selecting music that meets the needs of performers while also entertaining an audience may sound pretty simple and straightforward. In reality, it is like working on a 5,000 piece puzzle. Some musical selections, like the borders of a puzzle, are easy to identify like a march and a paso doble. Other choices are quite challenging and require continuous mixing and matching until it makes sense. How does the music fit the membership of the Spring 2026 Watsonville Community Band versus previous iterations? Will the musical selections be relevant, relatable, and entertain audiences of today at Pajaro Valley High School, Roaring Camp, and San Francisco venues?

As conductor of our band, I believe the answer to these questions can only be found if I learn more about our musicians and our audiences. I need to learn more about what we do well, what are our areas of improvement, and how to elicit a response from performers and audience members alike that says, “I really want to experience Watsonville Community Band music!” I strongly believe we hit the mark and took a frog leap forward with this goal with our Spring Concert Series performances.

The music we play is significant not only for the now, but also for the future of the Watsonville Community Band. Think about how many people our music has entertained and educated since our founding in 1947. I can’t even fathom the range of shared emotions our performances have brought to so many people around the world over the course of seventy-nine years. During that span of time, our musical performances have evolved to meet the needs of our band and our audiences. As we prepare new music for upcoming performances, it is vital that our band continues to evolve and remain relevant to musicians and audiences. Let’s grow to ensure we honor the musicians and audiences of past to keep our 1947 — indefinite. With change and growth, we will continue to write the next chapters of our band.



Keeping It Going

Elizabeth Black, Business Manager



One never knows the twists and turns that come our way in life. Watching my husband, Gail Black, struggle through medical challenges reminds me that life is precious. We have the opportunity to make an impact with the time we are given. Like many of us who have gone through medical events in our lives it is the slow sure path of Providence that brings us through. My husband loves music, and has brought many young students into the fold of being musicians, some of whom have become Watsonville Community Band members. Our goal is to encourage musicianship for a lifetime, as one learns to love all types of music, especially instrumental band music.

Now that it is spring, WCB has the privilege to host the Pajaro Valley High School Band, directed by Emilio Reed Alaniz, to join us for a combined concert. You won't want to miss this opportunity to see young people shine as musicians. Also performing is the WCB Youth Band under the direction of our own Bill Nestler, Jeanne Byrne, and Alice Miller with its twenty-five musicians aged 9 to 15 years old. Please come to the Mello Center, Wednesday, May 13 at 7pm for a heartfelt moment to encourage so many young people who have committed themselves to learning how to create music.

Also a brilliant moment: Come to Roaring Camp, Felton, to celebrate Memorial Day with us on Monday, May 25. We shall play our march at 10:30am at the rail station, followed by two concerts in Bret Harte Hall, at 11am and 1:30pm. It is always fun to sit outside in the picnic area with friends and family for lunch in between concerts. Not to

mention how lovely the huge redwood trees are that surround the rail station at Henry Cowell State Park next door. Those redwood giants are just one more reminder of the constancy of the ever flowing balance of life that goes way beyond our lifetime. Come join us, and you will add joy to your life and pleasure for your ears.



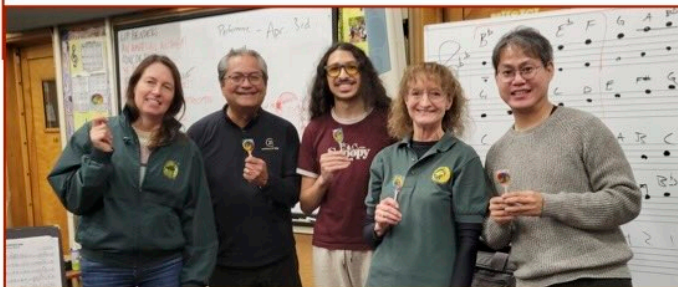
Board President Antonio Trujillo presented loooooong time band members with pins honoring their years in the band. (L to R) Eugene Smith and Rich MacLeod congratulate each other on their survival!



Channeling the spirit of the "Ricky Ricardo Latin Band" for *Begin the Beguine*, French horns (L to R) Nathan, Gene, and Jill are rocking it!



April Sucker Awards went to percussionists **Dana Sales** and **Mateo Cuprill** for stepping in while perennial room setter-upper **Roger Erickson** is out for a bit, and to **Jesse Cowan**, **Barbara Smith**, and **Calvin Chang** for their pre-rehearsal flute sectional!



APRIL BIRTHDAYS

HAPPY BIRTHDAY to (L to R) **Juan Silva**, euphonium, and **Chris Erskine**, tenor sax!





Our 78th Annual Spring Concert Series played to appreciative audiences in Watsonville and Santa Cruz. Featuring music from and reminiscent of our many trips throughout the US and abroad, the band had a great time “breaking in” our new Conductor, Dr. Jesse Leyva. Well done, Jesse!



WATSONVILLE COMMUNITY BAND 2026 SCHEDULE

- May 13 - Concert with PVHS Band, Mello Center, 7pm
- May 25 - Memorial Day Concerts, Roaring Camp, Felton, 11am & 1:30pm, Bret Harte Hall
- June 13 - Golden Gate Band Festival, San Francisco, Noon
- June 20 - Saddle Horse Show Parade, Hollister, 11am
- July 4 - *Independence Day Parades*
Aptos, 10am, Watsonville, 12:30pm
- August 1 - Strawberry Festival, Downtown Watsonville
- August - *79th Anniversary Concerts*
28 - Henry Mello Center, Watsonville, 7:30pm
29 - The Landing, Scotts Valley, 2pm
- September 19 - Santa Cruz County Fair
- November 11 - Veterans Day Ceremony, Watsonville
Henry Mello Center, 10:30am
- December - *79th Winter Concert Series*
11 - Henry Mello Center, Watsonville, 7pm
12 - Peace United Church, Santa Cruz, 2pm
13 - The Landing, Scotts Valley, 2pm



Published monthly by the
Watsonville Community Band,
A Charitable Trust
P.O. Box 1708 • Watsonville, CA 95077
www.watsonvilleband.org
Antonio Trujillo, President
Dr. Jesse Leyva, Conductor
Eugene Smith, Editor