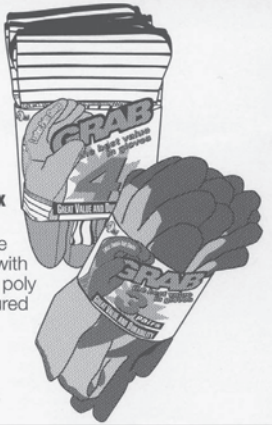


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Lafayette: Stanley Middle School

A Perspective on Bob Athayde

by Lee Borrowman

This story should write itself, or so I thought. Three days and an annoyingly blank screen later I had to admit that I may have been mistaken. How do you write about someone like Bob Athayde, Music Director at Stanley Middle School and the California Music Educators Association's Music Educator of the Year, without resorting to over-used but not undesired adjectives such as "inspired," "dedicated," or "brilliant?" Yet this is a different sort of teacher whose energy and presence, despite a plethora of positive press and publicity, has not been adequately transcribed into words. Perhaps that simply means I'm foolish to try, but to understand why the awards and praise just keep coming one needs to enter Athayde's world.

One Saturday last month Athayde invited me to drop by the Band Room at Stanley Middle School. He was there to welcome the Contra Costa Middle School Honors Jazz Band, which would be rehearsing for a performance at the Lafayette Jazz Festival. I intended to stay only for a short time, just long enough to jot down a few words from him with respect to the recently won CMEA award and the Honors Band, and to investigate the rumor that he serves freshly brewed Peet's coffee (I was delighted to find this to be true). Three hours later, I left feeling like I'd just been on some sort of mini-vacation to a fabulous destination.

The success of his students speaks to Athayde's award-winning teaching abili-

ties. "Grab your passion, share your passion and they'll get turned on. It's not work, because I'm doing what I love to do." Athayde's methods may change, influenced by the variety of working professionals that he brings to his classroom on a regular basis, but his love of music, his enthusiasm and his determination to ensure that his students always have music in their lives are both enduring and engaging. Although he himself is a talented jazz artist, Athayde says "I would never encourage a student to become a professional musician. That's a hard life. But music can and should be a part of their lives, whatever they go on to become. It can be a personal therapist and it can provide balance."

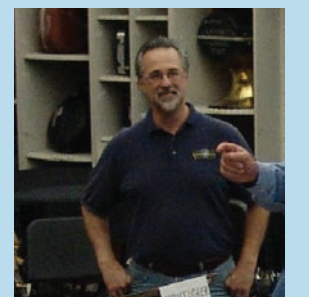
Parents of Athayde's students are frequent guests in the Band Room, some still returning long after their kids have

moved on to high school and beyond. They come to help out, or just to listen to music from time to time. Still struggling to understand the Athayde phenomenon I turned for help to Adam Noel, Music Director at Joaquin Moraga Intermediate and a former student of Athayde. I asked, "What is it about Bob?" "He's a dazzler," replied Noel. "He has a natural gift for drawing people to him. His excitement and enthusiasm make people believe in what he believes in. Bob made me excited about making music. He makes people feel important and like they belong." Noel will tell you that as a child he was not someone you would ever expect would grow up to become a music educator. He credits Athayde for getting him "interested in making music with other people." As a student at Acalanes High School, Noel began to wonder if per-

haps music might not play a bigger part in his life after all. He says he asked himself at that time, "What is it I love most about music?" And the answer was, "Bob's class. I knew then that I wanted to touch lives the way Bob had touched mine."

Bob Athayde's talents lie not just in teaching music but in his ability to nurture the musical soul in everyone, and in what he describes as "making connections with and between people." As our meeting came to an end, I accused Athayde of having spent more time complementing others than in talking about his own work. He shuffled his feet and shrugged, and his face bore a look not unlike that of a child caught with his hand in the cookie jar.

Lee Borrowman and her kids live in Moraga. You can reach her at lee@lamorindaweekly.com.



Bob Athayde recalls that about a year and a half ago the Contra Costa Honors Jazz Band almost ceased to exist. Interest was running at an all time low. A member of the Generations in Jazz Foundation Board told him, "It can't go away. It must continue, because somewhere out there is a sixth-grader who is looking forward to being in the Honors Band." Athayde looked toward the practice room with a happy smile and said, "That sixth-grader, whoever he or she was, is in there right now."

Two Stanley Debaters Win Top Prizes

by Julie Penfold

Stanley Intermediate School had the strongest individual showing in Saturday's Inaugural Tournament of the Middle School Debate Program, held at JM. The event, the first of its kind in Northern California, pitted teams from local Lamorinda intermediate

schools OIS, Stanley, and JM, and Sutter Intermediate School in Sacramento.

The JM program will serve as a model for expanding the debate program nationwide. Kate Shuster, director of the middle school debate program, said "I predict leagues of debate teams

in this area in just a few years and everybody will look back on this Saturday here at JM and say "this is where it all started."

Stanley's Syd Salsman took the gavel and first prize for individual debates. He found the day-long event, "long but totally worth it. The judging was fair and some of it was quite constructive." Salsman's favorite part of the debate is researching the topic, although he said he loved presenting the argument, too. Salsman's favorite argument in this tournament was "The Death Penalty Should Be Abolished in California."

Stanley teammate Josua Bulos took third place

in the individual tournament. He thought it "was a great first debate. We prepared a lot." Bulos' favorite debate was "TV is a Good Influence on Adolescents."

First place team honors went to Sutter School in Sacramento. The second place debate team was a combination of Sutter and Stanley students. Third place in the team category went to OIS.

Though this was its first showing in Northern California, the middle school debate program has a much stronger presence in other parts of the country. This year, 1500 middle schools participated in the debate tournaments nationwide. Sponsored by Claremont McKenna College, the Middle School Debate Program is currently the largest middle school debate tournament in the world, larger even than the largest college tournament. All schools are welcome to enter, stresses Shuster, who characterizes participation in the program as "a civics education. It's trying to build a better democracy one 11-year-old at a time."

For more information, go to www.middleschooldebate.com



John Bremis rehearses the band

Middle-Schoolers Rock? No, they Swing!

By Lee Borrowman

If you attended the Lafayette Jazz Festival last weekend, you may have had the pleasure of hearing the Contra Costa Middle School Honors Jazz Band. Sponsored by the Generations in Jazz Foundation and under the direction of John Bremis, award-winning music director from Lewis H. Britton Middle School in Morgan Hill, the sixteen boys and four girls of the Honors Jazz Band may be young but they already know their way around a jazz riff.

Selected after a competitive audition in January, this talented group of young musicians first met each other and Director Bremis in the Band Room at Stanley Middle School on a rainy Saturday in February. The newly formed Honors Band went straight to work, but Bremis took a moment during the break to describe the students as "fine musicians and great human beings." The 6th-8th graders dove into the music like seasoned professionals. One proud father said his son

"listens to jazz on his i-Pod." Lafayette City Manager Steve Falk, who was busily making name tags for the students, considers membership in the band "a true honor, because the quality of jazz in this city is so high."

Falk's daughter Angela, the only sixth-grader in the Honors Band, wields a trombone that's nearly as tall as she is with poise and grace. "I was afraid rehearsal might be harder, but it's okay!" said the younger Falk. The supremely confident Erin Grant took it all in stride. A performance veteran, the 8th grade sax player and Stanley Student Body President would not admit to practicing any more than an hour a day, "and that includes my other instruments, too."

In addition to Falk and Grant, Stanley Middle School was energetically represented by flautist Chris Joe and tenor sax player Matthew Rosenthal. The other student musicians were drawn from across Contra Costa County.



Syd Salsman - 1st; Josh Balos - 3rd & Matt Feld - 7th

Lafayette: Acalanes High School

Acalanes Team Heads to Los Angeles

by Lee Borrowman

The athletes are packing their bags today, getting ready to hit the road to L.A. But these students don't practice on the field. They practice for several hours each week in a classroom. They are the members of the Acalanes Academic Decathlon Team that beat out former champs Miramonte and Campolindo to take the Contra Costa County title for the first time in ten years. Now they are heading for the State Finals in L.A. on March 15.

The decathletes are pleased with their achievement, and they say that academic events are making a come-back at Acalanes. The Model UN group has done well at regional events, as has the Mock Trial team. "We can be proud of being smart; we don't

have to act like geeks hiding in the library," says Adithi Rajapuram, a compelling speaker who captured a silver medal in the speech competition. Triple-medal winner Mary Renno agrees, "We can do these events, and do them well." A self-assured Decathlon veteran, Renno is also a member of the Mock Trial team.

Coach Joe Schottland explains, "There are two great things about the decathlon. One is that the team is composed of really smart kids with different levels of academic achievement, some have 4.0 GPAs and some have GPAs that are skewed for different reasons. Some may never have been challenged intellectually. The other is the variety of events in the competitions. Because it's a de-

catlon every student must participate in all ten events, so the shy kid who's a math whiz also has to make a speech."

"Being a team is very important to these kids," says co-coach Karen Findlay. They practice together, and offer each other both positive feedback and constructive criticism. Although Schottland would like to have a for-credit course to train students for the Decathlon, the students disagree. "It means more because we do it on our own time," argues one young man. "We can't really compete against the L.A. teams who go to a decathlon class every day, but who wants to do it just to get a grade?"

Sophia Evans, Austin Moehle, Carson Ley, Mary Renno, Yoonho Ji, Adithi Rajapuram, David Kaplan, Charles Richards, Eva Haese and unofficial team mascot Dominic Schottland (Joe Schottland's young son) know that they are facing stiff competition in L.A. this week. Past Contra Costa County teams have generally placed in the middle of the pack. The National Academic Decathlon Finals will be held in Honolulu, Hawaii, in April and should this team advance to that event these decathletes will be looking forward to a well-deserved day at the beach.



Two of the team display medals

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