

# Senior's Endowment Benefit Inspiring Musicians . . . What's Your Passion?

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Robert Briggs spent most of his 80 years breathing life into instruments.

For decades, Briggs took his passion for music into the hearts of his students at Armijo High School and those at the University of Berkeley, California. He spent hours instilling the importance of harmony and composition, never realizing the impact his contributions would have on these students.



Johnny Colla, once a student of Briggs at Armijo, went on to play with Sly and the Family Stone, later becoming a member of Huey Lewis and the News. Another student, Garry Ichikawa and once a member of the Armijo band became Superior Court Judge for Solano County.

Briggs humble upbringing began in Modesto, an area once filled with farm land, country schools and long days. It is a place where the dirt roads welcomed his great-grandfather, a man who arrived soon after the Civil War from Illinois leading a wagon train.

Briggs grew up in this farming region, milking cows, tending to land and biking 1.5 miles to school. And day after day, he would pack his small clarinet that his father purchased by mail order in 1908 into the basket of his bicycle, nestled comfortably alongside his school books.

Briggs continued with music into his years at Modesto High School, a property once owned by his great-grandfather and that today has a road that runs alongside the high school named Briggs Avenue. But his career took flight after attending Cal Berkeley, where a failing grade changed his major from math to music.

I've thanked that professor ever since, Briggs said.

He was part of the Cal Berkeley marching band, the concert band and performed in three consecutive Rose Bowls from 1949-51. He served in the U.S. Army Band for three years and soon after became the band director at Armijo High School for 12 years.

In 1967, he was asked to be the assistant director at Cal Berkeley and in 1971 was promoted as band director, where he maintained this position for 24 years. Soon after his retirement in 1995, he founded Solano Winds, a community concert band in the city of Fairfield.

His passion for music and belief in its importance for the youth remains strong for Briggs today. Four years ago, he opened an endowment fund at the Solano Community Foundation, awarding scholarships to students from Fairfield, Armijo, Rodriguez and Vanden High Schools who continue onto a four-year college in the state of California and major in music.

I wanted to provide something that goes on perpetually, Briggs said of his endowment fund, which he hopes will grow with contributions from other interested donors to assure as many scholarships are awarded. This is a very good music community with very successful band programs and I hope the scholarship is a motivator for students.

The endowment fund at the Foundation creates a legacy for Briggs and ensures a continuous flow of grants with the growing interest and dividends of the fund.

Today, Briggs can be seen just about anywhere students are playing music - at middle school concerts, spring band concerts and parades. And his love for music will always remain - perpetually.