

Opinions

... Editorial on band sparks flood of letters

Positive things happening with school system

To the Editor:
This letter is not intended to debate the facts of your editorial about our high school band because I do not know the facts upon which your article was based.

But, there are several things I do know and they need to be told to the citizens of Hoke County. I am not only the parent of a band member, but a member of the faculty at the high school. I have ridden the buses to every band competition this year as a chaperone; I have seen the band perform at every home football game.

I also rode the bus for the one out-of-town football game our band performed in - that was on September 28 at Terry Sanford Senior High School. At no other time did our band perform at an out-of-town ballgame.

Your article led the citizens of this county to believe that our band marched in every single one of them.

Let me tell you about our performance at Terry Sanford.

When we arrived it was pouring down rain, there was no building provided for our students to warm-up in, much less stay dry.

Our kids sat on the buses for almost two hours. They got off, warmed up in the rain, performed in the rain, listened to the spectators from Terry Sanford scream obscenities at them during the entire performance, got back on the buses and came straight back to Raeford. I cannot really say we enjoyed the evening.

The uniforms were muddy and soaked with water and had to be cleaned up before a competition the next day.

One-third of our student body at Hoke County High School performs in the marching band - that should tell our citizens how much our kids think of their band.

No other group in our school has as many members or as much participation.

Your editorial has hurt them so much emotionally and professionally.

I tried to explain to them last night that your editorial was not aimed at them, that it was not a personal attack on their ability, but that it was an attack on the leaders of their band. I can tell you that the kids did not take it that way - they took it personally and they are hurt and upset.

They probably remember the 90° and above weather in August when they practiced every day, all day - the gnats, the bugs, the aching feet, the exhaustion. They also remember that their leaders were out on the field with them sharing the same weather conditions.

I have spoken as a parent, now I would like to speak as a teacher. These kids have so much pride in what they do and what they have accomplished.

They have been called the "Pride of Hoke County" so many times they have begun to believe it.

Your editorial went a long way toward shattering the feelings we have been trying to instill in them for so long.

I wish you and I could exchange places for a day - I wish that you could see how hard our kids try, both in their academic classes and their extra-curricular activities.

I wish you could see how much our teachers care, because sometimes we feel that we are the only ones who do care about what happens to them.

It takes us years to gain their trust, years to build up their confidence - it took you only a few minutes to destroy all it takes us so long to build. You see, the kids identify the band with its director - there is no distinction as far as they are concerned. They are equally devoted to both. If you attack one, they see it as an attack on both themselves and their director.

Another point - please give the Hoke County School System a break. We really are doing a good job. No, we don't have everything we need, nor all the money it takes to have modern, new buildings, beautiful new band uniforms, unlimited equipment. But we do have a lot of fine kids and first-class teachers. We teachers are trying so hard to be proud of what we do in a time when it has become popular to blame all the ills of

society on the public schools and most especially teachers.

My students will tell you that no one feels more strongly about freedom of the press than I do. But, I also believe very strongly that the press has a responsibility to check all of the facts with all parties involved before printing them.

I have a few last memories to share with your readers. Last year we had a fine student to win a four-year academic scholarship (an honor that very few of our students ever receive). We asked your paper to come out and take a picture of him - you didn't.

Last year I had the privilege of teaching a fine young man. When the tornado struck in Red Springs that young man stayed out of school for several days so that he could work in that town - he went without sleep for days helping wherever he could. That young man is the captain of our band and an Eagle Scout. We are very proud that he accepts all of our honors and awards for us in the name of the Hoke County High School Marching Band.

Last month we attended our final competition of the season in Sanford. Our five buses were very ragged, indeed. One of them broke down in Vass and we had to transfer all of the kids and equipment to another bus - no complaints from the kids. We got inside the city limits of Sanford and bus number two broke down. We waited almost an hour for bus number three to unload and come back for us - no complaints from the kids. We arrived late, we were frustrated, tired. Those kids went out on that field and gave a performance that was rated a Superior, the highest rating you can get.

The citizens of Hoke County deserve to hear the good things about their school system, their children in that system, and their teacher. I hope that in the future you will share those things with our community - it isn't difficult for you to print the negative things about us. I'll be glad to share our positive accomplishments with you.

Sincerely,
Harriett S. McDonald
Hoke County
High School Faculty

Facts put straight

To the Editor:

I would like to voice my appreciation to *The News-Journal* for its past support of the Hoke County Band Program.

I have been in Hoke County since 1964 and I can say with all sincerity that *The News-Journal*, and the many people who have worked with the paper, have been one of the reasons that the Hoke County Band Program has been successful in fund raisings, public performances and public relations.

With the help of *The News-Journal*, and three wonderful ladies, \$7,000 was raised for new uniforms within less than a month. I could never repay Paul Dickson, Jim Taylor, Sam Morris, and all the others, for their help. They helped me build a band program within the schools from 25 members to approximately 500 today.

I, personally feel that *The News-Journal* can and will, continue to support the band program. But before this will happen there are some false statements in the December 13 viewpoint that need to be cleared up.

I hope the following information will take care of this:

Fact #1: I was visited by the band director and an assistant principal (who is also a former band director) from the Red Springs City Schools. I told them that we have overspent our budget, and that I had no money for chartered buses. They told me they were willing to pay our expenses, and they asked what it would cost. I told them somewhere between \$400-\$600, depending on the availability of the school activity bus. I told them that it would be ridiculous for them to pay that much money for us when they could use it in other places. I told them that the band members did not like to march in long parades, but the students would like this Red Springs parade because they would get out of school after lunch.

Fact #2: We had a general talk about bands, and then I

suggested that they contact the Upchurch Junior High School Band to march in our place, since it is a smaller band and would be less expensive. We all agreed that due to the size of the high school band, that it would be too expensive to ask the parade committee to pay for five buses. It is not an unusual procedure for towns to pay transportation costs to bands when they need to travel to a parade. As a matter of fact, I know of no town that does not! All the bands that participated in the Red Springs parade were helped with travel expenses.

Fact #3: The Hoke High School Band has never charged a fee to march in a parade! The \$600 figure mentioned was simply an estimate of the cost of five chartered buses that would be required to transport our 200 high school band members from our school system which has such a limited expense budget. At no time did I say, think, or even suggest that the band would come for a \$600 fee. As a matter of fact, the band does not even charge for concerts.

Fact #4: Since our band is very competitive, it is very important to the band members as to how they are ranked among their peers, just as it is important to the ball players on an athletic team.

Fact #5: I do not know of any major hometown parades in which the Hoke High Band has not participated. There has been rumor that the Hoke Band refused to march in this year's Veterans Day parade. This is not true. The Hoke Band had planned since last spring to march in this parade. The parade was not held due to lack of outside participation! Last year's Veterans Day Parade was one of the better parades in which we have ever marched.

I hope this letter will explain what really happened and clear up any misconceptions that may exist.

Thank you,
Jimmy James
Hoke County
High School
Band Director

Disappointing opinion

To the editor:

I am not a member of the Hoke High Band, but I am a student of Hoke High School!

I am very disappointed in the article written in *The News Journal* on December 13.

When you put the band down, you are putting the school down as well, and I am a part of that.

I was rather astounded at the newspaper's low opinion of the Hoke High band directors and leaders. They help make the band what it is today.

Melinda Riley

Disheartening band portrayal

To the editor:

I was very disappointed and concerned to read the editorial depicting the Hoke High School Band in such a negative way.

I understand the facts to be quite contrary to those published. The students of the band and their director have represented Hoke County in a very positive, uplifting, and professional way for many years. I am sure this will continue.

Hoke County was represented beautifully in the Red Springs parade by the Upchurch Band.

What a disheartening portrayal by the editor of a very deserving and hardworking group of young people and their director!

Ruth Anne Warren
Faculty member
Hoke High School

Negative emphasis

To the editor:

I am writing in reference to the editorial about the Hoke High Band that appeared in last week's *News-Journal*.

The band has brought a lot of positive attention to our school system. It has served as an ambassador for Hoke County and is known all over the state for its excellence.

Our school system has received enough adverse publicity during the past year, and we don't need

articles such as last week's editorial that are completely misleading.

The facts were misrepresented and sometimes wrong in that article.

The Hoke High band leaders did not "request a \$600 fee" to march in the Red Springs parade.

Red Springs offered to pay our expenses but it would have cost \$500 - \$600 to charter five buses to go to the parade. We do not have activity buses for the band, and we couldn't have used school buses because the parade was on Friday afternoon.

Red Springs was not able to pay these expenses and the Hoke High Band did not have the money available. Therefore the decision was made to decline the invitation to march in the parade. These facts were not presented in the recent editorial. Instead the band and its leaders, who have done nothing but enhance the image of our school system and Hoke County, were made to appear selfish, insensitive, and money-grabbing.

As a band parent, a teacher, and a citizen of Hoke County, I do not appreciate the negative publicity caused by an article that distorts the facts. If we want to improve the image of Hoke County schools, I think that *The News-Journal* should start printing more articles about the good things happening in our system.

It seems to me that the paper has been emphasizing the negative aspects, often without having all the facts!

Susan Houston

Retraction sought

To the Editor:

As a concerned member of the 8th grade band at Upchurch Jr. High School, I would like to inform you that your "viewpoints" section in the December 13 edition is nothing but a bunch of falsehoods.

Hoke County was represented by the 8th grade band of Upchurch Jr. High School at the Red Springs appreciation day parade. We are disappointed that you failed to bring out this fact.

The directors did not ask for a \$600 fee that figure was a cost for the chartered buses. The Hoke High Band traveled to four competitions, not five, in which they brought back at least one award from each.

The band traveled to one away game.

School officials and Board members should be more supportive of the band. They will not give them funds to replace the old worn out uniforms and instruments that are falling apart.

This event did not give the county a black eye but this article gave the directors and the supportive parents, that are raising money for the band, a black eye.

The new perspective you gave the public is not the kind of perspective we, the students, or directors want for our band.

If you ever want to do another story on the band I suggest you get your information from the band directors.

Myself, along with many others, feel that a retraction and an apology to the students and directors, is necessary.

Sincerely,
Kris McMillan

'Inexcusable' article

To the Editor:

Your article on Hoke County Bands was inexcusable, relentless and irrelevant.

Upchurch Jr. High Band went to Red Springs and represented Hoke County in an acknowledged and well-suited manner.

You sit on your can all the time and you didn't even bother to come to the parade yourself, cause if you would've you would've seen us!

I understand your freedom of press, but we still have our freedom of speech! Hoke County does not need that kind of a *News-Journal*.

Hoke County
Band Member
Jeffrey B. Melvin
(Trumpet, U.J.H.S.)
8th grade

Mad about story

To the Editor:

I, Michael Mercer, a member of the Hoke High Band, and proud of it, is proud to have Jimmy James

and Gil Clark as the band directors.

Let me tell you that if they are doing such a bad job, why did we get a superior rating in "every" competition. How did we get such a good, no, fantastic rating if we had such a "sorry band director."

I know that James would not charge a \$600 fee to march in the parade. You should get your facts straight. It would have cost us \$600 to get the band to Red Springs.

I feel that the leaders handled the invitation the best way they thought how and I support their decision completely. What happened did not put a shadow on Hoke County and did not diminish the good deeds done by many of this county's residents last spring. We, the Hoke High Band, are extremely mad that such a story, that is all a lie, could have been printed about our "wonderful band directors!"

Respectfully,
Michael Mercer
Hoke High Band
Student

Editorial was slap in face

To the Editor:

The December 13 "Viewpoint" section of the *News-Journal* attacking the Hoke County Band Program, its directors, and its boosters was an outright slap in the face to us. All of us, 107 strong, are disappointed that we were not recognized for our efforts.

The Hoke High Marching Band has 200 members. It would have taken five buses to transport them to the Red Springs parade and the band could not afford to charter the buses. Our director, Gil Clark, and Jimmy James, the Hoke High band director, felt it would be less costly to take us - **The Upchurch Jr. High Eighth Grade Band** - to the parade. We were given the opportunity to participate and serve as the ambassadors for Hoke County and were more than happy to do it.

The December 13 editorial was the result of a misinterpretation being blown completely out of proportion. We hope that in the future these misunderstandings will be straightened out, and that we can continue to depend on *The News-Journal* as the source of news for the Hoke County area.

Members of the
Upchurch Jr. High School
Eighth Grade Band

Decision was correct

To the Editor:

I think that your article about the band in this week's *News-Journal* is inexcusable.

I don't think you know all the facts behind the article you wrote. Did you ever stop to think about maybe the booster club didn't have the money for the band to go to march in the Red Springs parade, or better yet, do you know what its like to march in a parade? Well, if you did you sure wouldn't have written this article.

I don't believe that the Hoke High Band gave the county a bad reputation just because they didn't go to the parade.

I think Mr. James did the right thing by declining the invitation.

Just because you think that the band's competitions are "meaningless", just because they don't go to one parade doesn't mean everyone is going to agree with you. I think the band members would disagree with you, because the competitions are very meaningful to them.

Susan Sullivan
Hoke High
Band Member

Boosters support band

To the Editor:

In the December 13 edition of *The News-Journal*, the editor has staked his viewpoint on the leadership of the Hoke High Band. I would like to reply to the so called editorial.

The editor states that the band leaders made no effort to raise the funds to cover the costs of this event. Apparently, the editor thinks that all one has to do to raise money is put a "free" ad in his paper and hold your hand out and wait for the money to come rolling in. The Band Booster Club has worked for months this year planning a raffle, getting tickets

printed up, selling tickets for two months and still only cleared around \$400. We certainly would have taken an ad out if we had known that was all one had to do to raise money.

The editorial says school officials were not informed of the invitation to this event. If school officials would attend the Music Booster Club meetings, they would have known of this invitation. Mr. James informed the boosters of the invitation and his reasons for not accepting it at our regular monthly meeting the first Monday night of this month.

The editorial states the band should march in our home town parades. Mr. James was asked to march in the Veterans Day parade this year and had agreed to do so. According to one organizer, he contacted bands within a 60 mile radius of Hoke County and our band was the only band who did agree to march.

The editor states that "All of Hoke County was injured by the Hoke High School band's refusal to march..." Well, I was not injured at all; I was immensely proud of the representation of Hoke County by the Upchurch eighth grade band.

To Jimmy James and Gil Clark, I say congratulations on a job well done. The Hoke County Music Boosters support you completely!

Cordially,
Diane Mercer
Band Chairman

Band defended

To The Editor:

In defense of the Hoke County High School, Band Director, Jimmy James, Hoke Music Boosters and supporters of this group, I would like to say--If you want to say something good, you go directly to the source--If you want to say something bad--ask the coffee drinkers in the local restaurant. This is where the comments were gathered that prompted the editorial published in the *News-Journal* on December 13.

It is ironic, that just last week, members of the Band Division of the Music Boosters, Superintendent, and Principals of Upchurch and Hoke High, and the Cultural Arts Director, met for a dinner to pay tribute to the band director, whom you so casually "shot down" in your editorial. We wanted to show our appreciation for all the time and dedication that he has shown, over the years, to making Hoke County High School Band recognized as one of the best bands in the state. Can we say this about Hoke County's athletic and academic achievements? And if we could, would it have been done by one teacher and one assistant?

I do not understand how the depleted funds of the Hoke High Band can diminish the good deeds done by the county's citizens. The fact remains that money is hard to come by. The Music Booster Club has planned fund raisers for the whole year and the members work hard to try to raise enough money to keep these kids going to state competitions, as they have in the past. Having such a good band with its superior reputation has increased the size until it is almost impossible to raise enough money to support it. This editor must think that these funds are easily and quickly raised.

I think in answer to the charges made against our band leaders that Hoke County citizens should realize just how far our band has come in such few years and how lucky we are to have a leader that has done so much to promote Hoke County's image statewide.

I hope the loyal supporters of the Hoke High Band will voice your opinion of this editorial and continue to give us your support as we strive to have the best band in the state. Hoke County High School Band is truly "The Pride of Hoke County".

Sincerely,
Jackie Williams

Get facts straight

To the Editor:

I am a devoted band parent and have been involved with the band for 14 years. I've supported and struggled along with the groups as the band has grown to the two hundred members it is today and recognized as a top band in the state.

An honor they well deserve!
(See LETTERS, page 4B)