

Students take carolling to the next level

Over the course of the last month you probably saw the student band of North Hastings High School at one event or another. Starting Dec. 3 with both the Barry's Bay and Bancroft Christmas parades, NHHS music students ? including junior ensembles, senior ensembles, and vocalists ? performed close to 15 times up to Dec. 23. That's each area parade, including Maynooth's and its following children's party at the ANAF and Coe Hill's parade, five performances at the Corner Café at the Bancroft Hospital for the North Hastings District Auxiliary's Festival of Trees, a retired teacher's luncheon at the Bancroft Curling Club, performances at Apsley's and Coe Hill's public schools, both a family Christmas dinner concert and Christmas concert at the Manor, at local schools and at the NHHS Christmas Assembly.

I sat down with music teacher Dianne Winmill to better understand where her dedication, and the dedication of her students, comes from.

?My husband will say you're really too busy right now, and I'll say, no I'm not, it's not that bad. Then I start to look at the schedule,? Winmill laughed. Performances were both during class and outside of class. She suggested it was all about getting out and bringing spirit into the community. If the students didn't know enough Christmas carols for the performance, Winmill would throw in well known songs off the top of her head that both her students and attendees would know ? Disney sonnets came up once or twice. *Jolly Old St. Nicholas*, *Jingle Bells* and *Deck the Halls* were the students' main festive songs.

This kind of commitment takes a lot of time, effort and resources. It also takes a great show of dedication from students.

When I was in high school, if I was close enough to Christmas break to smell the gingerbread, I can't say I showed up to class every day. For Winmill's class however, even when the school was celebrating Indigenous Day, her students showed up to travel to the Corner Café to perform.

?I give up a lot of my home time for this job,? said Winmill, explaining that her students do so as well to practice. This is especially true if they wish to take their Royal Ontario Conservatory of Music exams.

Winmill suggested NHHS is one of the only schools she knows of that helps students prepare to get their conservatory accreditations.

?If you say you have your Grade 1 Royal Conservatory flute, if you say that around the world everybody knows what level you play at. Royal Conservatory knows of no other school that does that,? she said.

It seems to me that Bancroft has one of the greatest music programs in the province, if not the country, thanks to the dedication of a great teacher and great students. It's incredible to see young adults give up their weekends and their free time to help out the community. It's just as cool to see the community reach back.

Winmill told me that she had been to concerts before where attendees had donated to the music program. This meant she could fix failing instruments and invest back into the students. Barry's Bay even sent a bus so the students could make the trip to perform in the parade.

So if you see a NHHS music student, or Winmill, wish them the best in the new year. They work really hard to make the winter a little louder and a little more lovely.