

Alumni band returns to Chippewa Valley

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By Thomas Franz 



Members of the Chippewa Valley High School alumni band perform during a concert Oct. 18 at Dakota High School. (Photo provided by Anjan Shah)

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CLINTON TOWNSHIP/MACOMB TOWNSHIP — Turning 50 years old gave Anjan Shah a chance to reflect on his past experiences in life.

Shah, a Chippewa Valley High School graduate who now lives in Baltimore, said one of those experiences he reflected on was his time as a member of the Chippewa band during his high school years.

He soon reached out to some of his former bandmates and eventually got 20 people on the same conference call to hatch the idea of creating a reunion band.

“There was a lot of motivation. Some of the feelings I had were reflected by other members, so there very much was an individual consensus, and the telephone call brought it to a group consensus,” Shah said.

Shah began organizing his group last winter with the mission of honoring their past educators. The musicians worked through the summer, and on Oct. 18, they performed a seven-minute piece during a Dakota High School collage concert.

“We’re trying to recognize the value and contributions of our music teachers and mentors,” Shah said. “They essentially were our architects of our future. They imparted discipline, teamwork and all of the intangible things that a music education addresses that can’t be necessarily quantified.”

In addition to performing at the concert, the group held a recording session to go along with a video they're scheduled to release online in December. The holiday-themed video will document how the group came together, its concert performance and its work in the recording studio.

It will also show interviews of the band members discussing what music meant to them and how it has impacted their lives.

"The thought was, what better time to show good will and reflect. These guys are essentially members of our extended family, and with the holidays, it seemed like the most appropriate time," Shah said.

Shah said the group included many individuals who remain involved in music. Craig Marshall, a 1982 graduate and trombone player in the alumni band, is currently an administrator at the University of North Texas, which has a prominent jazz education program.

Rena Urso, a 1985 graduate, played the flute in the alumni band, and still plays the flute for the Long Beach Symphony in California.

Marshall and Urso traveled around the Chippewa Valley district during the week of the concert to teach students about musical concepts, techniques and their careers.

"It was a combination of a little bit inspiration as well as a little bit of technical understanding of some important elements in music," Shah said of the group's teaching.

Although the group met just once a month between forming and playing in the concert, Shah said it was effortless to rekindle the group's chemistry from high school.

"We really started to think about that, and came to the realization there's a common bond that develops when you're working in a team environment. One of the things we recognized, because music and making music has an emotional component to it, that the bond intensifies quite a bit," Shah said. "We found that is the common thread that ties us back together and has made it so easy to reconnect. It's been kind of magical in that respect."