

Kentfield Greenbrae Historical Society Historian

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President's Message

On Saturday, May 10th, from 11 AM - 2 PM, the Kentfield Greenbrae Historical Society (KGHS) is partnering with Bon Air to celebrate our shared heritage and local history with our annual FREE, family-friendly community event at Bon Air. We will honor and celebrate our local schools and the extraordinary services and programs provided by Marin community organizations.

Performances by student musicians from Bacich, Kent, White Hill, Hall, Branson, and Marin Catholic will be the featured highlight of the event. (Read more about the history of the Kent Middle School music program and their beloved music teachers below).

Enjoy a showcase of free samples from 50+ local farms and food producers and hands-on activities for kids and adults.

A fun, popular passport game encourages attendees to visit community organization booths to receive coupons for smoothies and soft serve cones generously donated from Jamba Juice and Gott's.

We hope to see you there!
Heather McPhail Sridharan
Co-president, 2024-2025

COMMUNITY FAIR ... MAY 10 from 11-2



KSD MUSIC PROGRAM a success from the beginning!

*Excerpts from In the Heart of Marin:
A History of Kentfield and Greenbrae
by Dewey Livingston*

A community's core is its school, and Kentfield is no exception. When the cornerstone for what would be named Adaline E. Kent School was laid in 1914, the event marked the advancement of the community from a waterfront hamlet of negligible reputation to a proud American village. The lower Ross Valley advanced from an old-fashioned one-room schoolhouse to a fine and modern edifice dedicated to the best elementary education possible. Since then, Kentfield and Greenbrae schools have provided just that, and even more.

Striving for excellence has been the bylaw of schooling in the community for over 150 years. The opening of rustic Ross Landing School in 1866 started a tradition of high-quality education, followed by a modern school in 1915. Incremental improvements continued including construction of two entirely new schools, among the best in the nation.

There is evidence that music was part of the early curriculum. Graduation festivities in the late 20s and early 30s included an orchestra, an operetta or play and of course speeches. In general, and despite the Depression, the school saw improvements during the 30s. A

school orchestra was formed, rehearsing in the Tamalpais Center. The district expanded its offerings of special classes during the 1940s... A music director was hired for the three districts within the confederated district, to supplement other creative and vocational classes. Alice Kent Stephens remembered singing at school in “wonderful” choruses: “very good harmony; the lyrics were lovely, and the tunes were lovely.” p 313



*Mr. Chestnut and his Kent Music Class 1964
(w/ old COM Gym in background)
Courtesy of Richard Torney*

In 1957, a year when enrollment at Greenbrae Elementary School increased by over 100 students, Kent sixth graders moved to Greenbrae School...students staying with one teacher in the mornings, and in the afternoons taking subjects such as music, shop, science and various elective courses offered by the school. Students from kindergarten to eighth grade reaped the benefits of enhanced programming. ... And the arts were not forgotten; in 1959 the respected musicologist Phil Elwood taught about jazz as an enrichment class... To accommodate the added electives, (then Superintendent) Bacich lengthened the school day by one hour and cut physical education from 50 to 20 minutes...

Marian Hayes Cain (1905-1991) taught at Kent for many years. She directed plays in the community and put on special plays at the schools, later to become director of the Mountain Plays. Adaline E, Kent School developed a fine music program that included a band and orchestra and participated in concerts and musicals.

The music program in the 60s thrived. According to Doug Murray ... “the music program was really good. I played the trumpet, French horn and baritone sax. I really enjoyed my time in the band. I got a bit rowdy in eighth grade so I had to wait outside the door...” The Kent School music program was exceptional. Dale Alstrom arrived in 1964 to teach band and orchestra to a small number of students. “We managed to make some pretty good music together. He remembered Superintendent Bacich’s plan...

“Superintendent Tony Bacich had a dream of making Kentfield a center of children’s performing arts in Marin, and one of the things he wanted was a summer school music/drama workshop. So, in the summer of ’65, we presented, “Space Available,” an original musical with libretto, lyrics and direction by Harvey Susser with a little help from...”

By the spring of 1967, the instrumental music program had grown considerably in volume and stature and was becoming recognized as one of the stronger programs in Marin. The elementary program had more than doubled, and the junior high orchestra, now numbering over 30 members, no longer had to rehearse after school, but had a full period,

five days a week, during the regular day. “One year Kent School sent a record number of students to the county wide honor orchestra,” Alstrom wrote, “and five of the first chair positions were awarded to Kent musicians-more first chairs from Kent than from any other school in Marin.”



*Cover of Kent Holiday Music from 1973
[Link to Music](#) (Marin IJ archives)*

A unique guitar choir was formed and led by Kent teacher Joyce Niboli, who had been hired in 1966 as a vocal music specialist. She let vocal choirs at all three schools, which held district-wide concerts with up to 300 student participants, but kids’ interest in choral singing was waning. “Sometimes I brought my guitar into the classrooms to accompany group singing,” Niboli later wrote, “and I encouraged students who played the guitar to bring their instruments and play along. One year at Kent, twelve sixth grade girls brought their guitars and had such a great time accompanying their class that they continued to meet as a group and sing together after school on early dismissal days. A guitar/choral group was born.”

The 70s was a time of shrinking enrollment, the closing of Greenbrae School and struggling finances. The music program

was saved by the forming of the Kentfield Schools Foundation in 1979 (now known as KIK... Kentfield Invests in Kids). The Citizens Finance Committee raised \$100,000 and reinstated the elementary and middle school instrumental music program among other important needs. Today KIK continues to support programs raising over \$1mil. annually.

In the 80s, with increased funding and a new sense of vitality, the Kentfield School District supported improvements and innovation in technology and the arts. Music programs had always been a priority in the district and survived the 1970s funding crises with a dedicated staff. Dale Alstrom continued to lead instrumental music programs with vigor. The music program at all schools in the district offered classes for students of all ages. Along with Alstrom's students, Joyce Niboli's vocal/guitar chorus continued to perform.

When Bob Ghiorzi was hired as a vocal music teacher at Bacich in 1986, he was asked by Principal Jacobs-Tusler to produce a December concert. ... "Kaki wanted a Winter Concert Extravaganza involving all the elementary students- kindergarten through third grade at Bacich, and fourth/fifth graders who were at the time housed at 'Bacich West' on the Kent campus during new construction...." The show held at the COM gym, was a huge success with standing room only.

The Kentfield School District had been through a lot by the time the 1990s rolled around. Fluctuations in enrollment and budget required adjustments that were made causing cuts to the music program... By the mid-90s, the music program enhancement was really a resurrection of the old program. Initially funded by a parent-led gift wrap sale campaign, the district hired part time instrumental music teacher Carol Caywood to supplement classes led by Bob Ghiorzi. "Restoring a music program to a school that had been without one for seven years was like being on an archeological dig. What was once a music room had become an all-purpose room for meetings and student activities." ... participation grew as word got around, and soon the various bands were made up of over 100 students. Memorable concerts were giving.

With reinstatement of a seven-period day in 2006, the music program expanded even more, with bands and choirs making music in their own designated music classroom. Today, Mike Martinez carries on the instrumental music tradition at Kent. SEE INTERVIEW

A Legacy of Music, Movement and Heart: The Story of Joyce Niboli Lisa Sandberg

In 1966, a young music teacher named Joyce Niboli began what would become a legendary career in the Kentfield School District. Known to students "Ms. Niboli," Joyce brought more than music to the classroom — she brought warmth, innovation, and a passion for teaching. Joyce began her journey as the choir teacher, working alongside instrumental

and band teacher Dale Alstrom. The pair quickly built a strong music program.



In those early days, Joyce traveled between three schools — Greenbrae Elementary, Bacich Elementary, and Kent School. As the years went on, the demands of moving between campuses took their toll. She approached the Superintendent with a request: to teach at just one site. Her timing couldn't have been better — Kent was in the process of transitioning into a middle school, and Joyce was able to settle in. There, she focused on teaching choir to 6th through 8th graders. Soon after, Kent became a 7th and 8th grade campus, and Ms. Niboli adapted once again.

Students flocked to her new guitar program, and it quickly became the most popular class on campus. Lisa Block (Sandberg), a 1972 Kent graduate, recalled, "I know that when I was at Kent, the guitar group was the most popular class on campus. I learned how to play the guitar and sing because of Ms. Niboli." Over the years, Joyce taught hundreds of students to play guitar — a legacy of music that lives on in their hearts.

Interview with Mike Martinez, Kent Music Director conducted by Lisa Sandberg 3.19.2025

Mike Martinez: I'm the Music Director here at Kent Middle School, and I've been here since 2008, so that makes it 17 years.

Q: What changes have you made since taking over as Music Director?

MM: When I took over, I worked to expand the music offerings. I introduced a string program, added a rock band and jazz band, and started both a karaoke and an instrumental competition. Melissa Stephens is now the 0-period and 6th Grade Choir Director. We now have three levels of band, three levels of orchestra, and two levels of choir. The rock band and jazz band are also growing in popularity. Our 0-period band is the largest class with 45 students participating before school.

Q: What is the most important part of having a music program?

MM: Music programs give middle school students the chance to explore and try new things. It's important to expose kids to a wide variety of instruments and music genres, allowing them to discover their passions and develop important skills, and foster creativity.

Q: With the impending budget cuts for next year impacting the Enrichment program, will the Music program be affected?

MM: As of now, I believe the music program will not be affected by the budget cuts. Since I teach all grade levels, I feel confident that our program will be one of the last to go, and I really hope it won't be eliminated at Kent. Music is such an integral part of the school culture here, and I think the community recognizes its value.

Q: What are you most proud of as the Music Director?

MM: I'm incredibly proud when I hear about former students who continue their music journey after leaving Kent. One example is Eli Sylla, the son of Rebecca Sylla. Eli was in my very first music class at Kent, and he became passionate about music, particularly jazz. He went on to win the Jazz Musician Award in high school, and he even pursued a music minor in college.

Q: Where did your love of music come from?

MM: My love of music started with my dad and grandmother. My grandmother worked at a bakery and would bring home day-old pastries, and I'd visit her to eat pastries and play piano. My dad, who was a guitar player, also had a big influence on me. I went on to study music at San Francisco State University, where I earned my degree in music education, with honors and my teaching credential.

Q: What has inspired you as a teacher at Kent?

MM: I've taught thousands of students—probably close to 7,000 or more—and I really feel like I'm making a positive impact in this community. One thing that really inspires me is the longevity of the musical connections here. For example, many years ago, I started a faculty band called *The Falconers*, and it's still going strong today, even as faculty members retire or move on. One staff member, who had just started learning the drums before retiring, continued playing and even returned to perform with us. I think that's amazing! Music does something powerful to the brain, especially when learning a new instrument. For my 50th birthday, I decided to learn to play drum set, and

just this past summer, I traveled to Germany and the Czech Republic with my band, Deutscher Musikverein or San Francisco, and played the drums over a 14-day tour. Music truly is my life, and I'm fortunate to be able to play in many different bands outside of Kent.



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