

OCHS band now owner of prize sousaphone, thanks to '61 grad

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By KRISTI CUMMINS
Staff writer



Oil City music department chair Martha LaVerde-Heise (left), high school senior Josh Thorne and band director Daniel Cartwright sit in the center of the high school stage with a sousaphone that was given to the school by world-famous tuba player and 1961 Oil City graduate Jim Self. (By Jerry Sowden) A former Oil City man now living in Los Angeles made a big contribution to the Oil City High School music program, just in time for Christmas.

Jim Self, a 1961 Oil City High School graduate, is now a world-famous tuba player and has performed on more than 1,500 movie scores, including "War Horse" and "The Adventures of Tintin," both directed by Steven Spielberg and hitting theaters this December.

Martha LaVerde-Heise, music department chair in the Oil City Area School District, wrote to Self to ask about some programs she could look into and facilitate to help replace aging musical instruments in the district.

"We have so many instruments starting to age and there's no money to replace them," LaVerde-Heise said. "He called me and said 'I'll tell you what I'm gonna do: I found this silver sousaphone Jupiter. It's been used a few times but I can buy it send it to the district.'"

The Jupiter Silver Sousaphone is valued at more than \$7,000 brand new, LaVerde-Heise said.

"A sousaphone of this nature is the type you typically see in the college marching bands," LaVerde-Heise said. "It's very eye-catching and very shiny with a great sound."

LaVerde-Heise picked up the sousaphone in Meadville on Tuesday where it was arriving on a bus after the trip from Los Angeles to western Pennsylvania.

LaVerde-Heise was extremely thankful for the generous donation to the district.

"I was elated," LaVerde-Heise said. "He (Self) learned to play the tuba at Oil City and wanted to show his support. One of the things I don't think people realize is that we have a marching band and a concert band, and we have several instruments that the school owns that students play. It's roughly \$500 for most of the instruments to be replaced. Especially with recent budget cuts from the state, to replace these instruments with our budget would take us a while."

Self said he was happy to help the district in this way.

“It all happened very quickly,” Self said. “She (LaVerde-Heise) wrote to me and they’re really hurting for those instruments, so I talked to a friend of mine who had it. I found this instrument for a pretty good price, I thought. It’s not brand new but it’s in excellent condition.”

Self said he hopes the sousaphone will be an excellent addition to Oil City’s music program.