



TCHS Band – Renfroe Era 1980's

BY GEOFFREY PRICE

Link to
Picture

Of Special Interest

Texas City High School music man facing retirement, but enthusiasm not dimmed

By Jerry Urban
News Staff Writer

TEXAS CITY—The Texas City High School band program—renowned for its high quality of performance for many years—will be going through a major change. The band program may be losing its leader and music man in the near future.

Robert L. Renfroe, who came to Texas City schools nearly 24 years ago, may be retiring. But, the date is uncertain and has not been officially announced. In fact, Renfroe says he will not be retiring for another three to five years.

Natives to the Texas City area are undoubtedly familiar with the band program and its copious national and state awards and recognition. However, if not...

It all begins each morning when Renfroe whistles his band to attention and says, "Let's get 'em gang." It's this enthusiasm for his work that has played a major role in the success of the program. Renfroe says he can't wait to get up in the morning—and "making music just doesn't get old."

In 1976, the Texas City High School band performed in Washington, D.C., representing Texas in the Bicentennial celebrations.

But, of course, excellence doesn't always come easy. One of Renfroe's students said, "He's tough and sometimes gets mad. But, he always forgives." At one early morning concert band session, Renfroe told his students, "I give my best, so I expect you to give yours."

The Texas City band won the first place concert and sight reading trophy in the 1979 national band competitions at Denver.

The high school program includes three concert bands with 80 members each. The marching band has 248 members. Although Renfroe says there has been a slight enrollment drop at Texas City schools, including the band program, he claims the current concert bands are the finest ever. Also, the level of music difficulty is greater today, adds Renfroe. He said the concert

bands work on university level pieces. The Texas City band has recorded first-division ratings in concert and sight reading competition at University Interscholastic League contests for 23 consecutive years.

The concert band season is just beginning. Two concerts are scheduled at the Texas City High School Auditorium in March.

Although the Texas City marching band program isn't emphasized today as much as the concert band, according to Renfroe, the Texas City marching band took a first-division slot in regional UIL competition this year.

Renfroe says after the football season, there's not ample time remaining for marching competition. Also, student interest has dropped in marching bands. Nonetheless...

Texas City High School bands have performed several times on national television at professional and college football halftimes. The most recent televised appearance was a year ago at the Cotton Bowl when the Oilers and Cowboys met in action.

Even with all his many years of honors and achievements, Renfroe says, "it is great excitement to accomplish something with students. Anyone can do what I do, as long as he has energy and a little imagination."

The Texas City band has been invited to attend the national band competitions this April in Boston. Texas City High School bands have performed and competed in Mexico City, California, Oklahoma, Chicago and Washington, D.C. Renfroe's bands were national champions three times.

After retiring, Renfroe says he'll do some kind of church work, probably associated with the First Methodist Church where he now teaches Sunday school. He may also give private music lessons.

But for now, Renfroe will be in the band hall each day insisting on excellence. "Get the tempo and get with it. Do it. Come on bass horns... See where the crescendo pops up."

Sunday Morning, February 27, 1981 The Houston Daily News 1-D



Staff Photos By Bill Barry



Sunday

August 9, 1981

The Daily

Sun



The home rule charter for the city of Santa Fe was approved by a 2-1 margin Saturday. Of the 180 votes cast, 113 approved the charter and 67 voted against.

Vol. 65 No. 911

The newspaper of **Mainland**

25 cents Daily
50 cents Sunday

No increase in taxes,

By CATHY GILLENINE
Assistant Managing Editor

TEXAS CITY—Citizens should be able to look forward to no increase in taxes this year, if a budget proposed for 1981-82 goes into effect with its present numbers intact.

Also, Mayor Emmett Lowry is proposing no increase in rates for water, sewer or garbage services, though last year's budget shows deficit spending in the water department slightly in excess of \$300,000.

With the rest of the county, Texas City will move to a 100 percent

valuation this year.

By translating \$1.55 on 25 percent of valuation to the 100 percent figures, the city should be able to get equivalent revenues with a 35 cents per \$100 valuation, barring changes in the tentative budget.

Total estimated revenues from all sources are estimated at \$10,413,143, which include \$4,641,843 in current and delinquent taxes, penalties and interest.

The city also expects to receive \$696,980 in additional revenue sharing funds, most of which is slated to be spent on capital improvements for every city department. Large expenditures from

Renfro reassigned



Robert Renfro

TEXAS CITY—Robert L. Renfro, director of Instrumental Music for the Texas City Independent School District and high school bandmaster, has been reassigned to assistant band instructor of Levi Fry Middle School.

Tommy A. SoRelle, 33, assumed Renfro's former post Aug. 1, school officials said.

"I asked to be relieved of my job as bandmaster and director of the district," Renfro told The Sun Friday.

"I requested an assignment to assist with the middle school programs where I can still make a contribution to the overall band program.

"Mr. Paul Manning, the school superintendent, and the school board have honored my request and it is my understanding that I have been reassigned to assist with the Levi Fry Middle School band," Renfro said.

Renfro joined the school district as director of Instrumental Music in 1947.

Except for a brief stint in the army, he has been with the district for 34 years.

Renfro, 53, received a B.S. degree in Music from Sam Houston State University in 1948 and a Masters degree from Southern College of Fine Arts in Houston in 1955.

Renfro has taught thousands of students over the years who have won countless awards for their achievements since 1947.

SoRelle officially assumed the post Aug. 1.

He has a B.S. degree in Music from Texas Tech and has taught music in Texas schools during the last 19 years.

A SPRING CONCERT

April 7, 1981 7:30 p.m.
Texas City High School Auditorium

PROGRAM

7:30 p.m.

The 7th Period Concert Band

Phil Armstrong, Director

March Juno Stewart
Dedicatory Overture Williams
American Folk Rhapsody Grundman

8:00 p.m.

The 2nd Period Concert Band

Robert Renfroe, Conducting
Don Gersch, Guest Conductor

Old Comrades March Teike
Songs of the Sea Mitchell
Mr. Gersch, Conducting
Suite in Eb Holst

Dr. Tom Lee, Conducting

8:30 p.m.

The 1st Period Concert Band

Robert Renfroe, Director
Dr. Tom Lee, Guest Conductor
Mr. Mark White, Guest Soloist

Marche Hongroise Faust
Symphony No. 3 Giannini
Dr. Tom Lee, Conducting
Satiric Dances Delo Joio
Dr. John Petersen, Conducting
Blue Bells of Scotland Pryor
Mark White, Soloist
West Side Story Sondheim-Bernstein

Texas City Band Department

Band Staff

Robert L. Renfroe Director of Bands
Dr. John Petersen Assistant Director
Randy Luster Woodwind Instructor
Betty Powell Woodwind Instructor
Phil Armstrong Woodwind Instructor
Don Gersch Director of Blocker Band
Brass Instructor
Rick Weathersby Director of Fry Band
Brass Instructor

Band Officers

P.J. Johnson President
Matt Arceneaux Vice-President
Connie Bage Vice-President
Robby Rhodes Student Director
Kathy McKnight Drum Major
D'Lisa Simmons Assistant Drum Major
Amy Stiernberg Assistant Drum Major

Honor Bandsmen

All-State Connie Bage and Alison Garrett
All-Area Crystal Cambiano, Joe Devlin, Tony Palmer,
Beverly Pope, Robbie Rhodes, Greg Sherwood,
David Weaks
All-Region Felicia Bailey, Terri Baten, Lisa Boyd,
William Bocker, Brad Collins, Daryn DeZengotita,
Ken Lamp, Kathy McKnight, Patti Nghiem, Yvonne
Pedraza, Scott Ryan, Lisa Sharer, Merita Staggs, Inez
Stepps, Amy Stiernberg, David Watson
Freshmen All-Region Rick Anderson, David
Ashbaugh, Jeff Beard, Stella Bodine, Kevin Herrin,
Lori Hill, Johnny Lawson, Denise Madden, Mary
Maris, Emily Nghiem, Debbie Palmer, Gayle Renfroe,
Dana Ross, Randy Rue-Las, Kevin Sandles, Stacey
Thompson

Link to
Picture

5/17-776-7564
Tim Sheddling
Marlene Sepp
Inez to side

Ex band director Robert Renfroe makes Bandmasters Hall of Fame

WOODVILLE — Robert L. Renfroe of Woodville, former Texas City High School and Woodville band director, was installed recently in the Texas Bandmasters Hall of Fame during ceremonies held in connection with the Texas Bandmasters Association annual convention in San Antonio.

To be eligible for this honor, a band director must have produced and maintained an outstanding and consistent band program in the Texas public schools as well as having enjoyed a long and successful career. Members must be over 65 and retired from active teaching.

Renfroe began his long career as a band director in Texas City in 1947.

While lacking 14 hours for graduation from Sam Houston State Teachers College, Renfroe received a temporary teaching certificate. He was employed as junior high director and high school marching director at the age of 19. He then completed his degree by correspondence and summer sessions.

Renfroe was offered the Gladewater directorship in 1948, but the Texas City schools refused to release him from his contract, and so began an association which was to last for 36 years.

In the early years, Renfroe's bands were strictly military in style. To enhance his shows, he developed a new kind of drill, known as the drill leader style of marching. On Thursdays, the musicians fell in behind the drill leaders, the Stingarettes, and a new show was perfected in one rehearsal. This style met with much success and brought the Texas City Band many invitations. It was the first high school band to march in the new Rice Stadium. Other appearances were in Aggieland, the University of Houston, for the Houston Oilers in the Astrodome, the Cowboys in Dallas and the Saints in New Orleans.

At the end of the 1980 school year, Renfroe and his wife Betty decided to

prepare for retirement. He stepped down from the high school to work at both middle schools and in the beginners program.

Two years later, a call came from Woodville. Anxious to move to the piney woods in anticipation of retirement, the Renfroes left Texas City after 36 years.

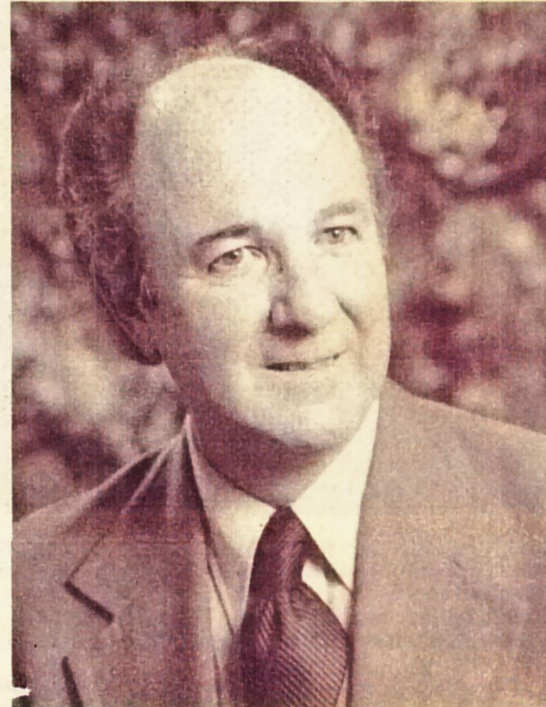
While Bob was just as successful at Woodville as he had been at Texas City, the long hours began to take their toll and riding those yellow buses had lost it appeal.

Bob retired in May 1988 after 41 years of public school teaching. The day after he retired, a district superin-

tendent of the United Methodist Church asked if Renfroe would be interested in becoming a local pastor and serving two small churches in his district.

After serving as a country minister for three very rewarding years, Renfroe retired once more.

These days Renfroe keeps busy filling in as interim band director at various area schools and teaching privately. "I don't spend much time reminiscing," he said, "but when I do, I am overwhelmed with gratitude for having had the opportunity to spend my life in such an exciting and rewarding profession."



Robert L. Renfroe

Letter to the editor

A tribute to Renfroe



To the editor:

I noted with interest an article concerning the reassignment of Mr. Robert Renfroe in a recent issue of *The Daily Sun*. I am fortunate to maintain a continuing relationship with Mr. Renfroe since my days in high school band, and thus feel compelled to add a few words to the painfully brief article printed in *The Sun*.

A list of Mr. Renfroe's awards and accomplishments is perhaps more appropriate for a later date. I should therefore like to offer my personal view of him. As a student of band conducting I am fully aware of the energy, dedication, and character necessary to make a significant contribution in the lives of students. As well as possessing these qualities in abundance, Mr. Renfroe also has the unique ability to transmit his profound love for his art and his deep affection for his students. Many levels and modes of communication are possible in music; different people have varying degrees of intrinsic response to music. It is, therefore, a tribute to him that so many of his students have felt their lives touched and their human values enhanced by his wonderfully warm manner and intense commitment to excellence in musical performance. Consider, as well, his thirty four years of service in pursuit of these ideals, and I am sure one will conclude, as others have, that Texas City has been blessed for many years with this very special man. The students

at Levi Fry are fortunate to be able to receive his insight and absorb his particular talents.

In closing, I must say that I find it rather unusual that a school official did not see fit to issue some kind of statement of appreciation for Mr. Renfroe's substantial and significant contribution to date. Perhaps the fact that this was a reassignment and not a retirement is the reason for this curious omission. I trust that this is the case.

I wish Mr. SoRelle the best of luck in his new endeavor. As I am sure he is stepping into very large shoes indeed As always, I will continue to follow the growth and progress of the band program in Texas City with a personal concern and interest.

Sincerely,
Gary Speck
1504 Gilbert Court
Ann Arbor, Michigan
48105

EDITOR'S NOTE:

We at the *Daily Sun* are well aware of Mr. Renfroe's contribution to the quality of the music program in Texas City's schools, and we have expressed appreciation for this expertise on numerous occasions. In this instance, we sought to do a feature story, but Mr. Renfroe's response was adamantly negative. Perhaps at some later date we will succeed in interviewing him - or other school officials - in a more relaxed atmosphere.



Can you hear 'Swinging on Parade?' It's the TCHS BAND

Former musicians, twirlers, dancers and flag bearers will meet, march Sept. 6



DALE BAILEY BRANNON
...To serve as drum major



RANDY HUNTER
...To serve as drum major



GETTING THEIR BEARINGS — Former band members attend practice every Thursday to help them re-learn the marching routines. Some old timers say they can still do them in their sleep.

By CATHY GILLETTE
Assistant Managing Editor

They were sitting in the stands, watching a Stingaree Band halftime show, when someone said, "I wish we could show them how we used to do it." And the others nodded in agreement.

In that moment, an idea was born between Barbara White-Jones, Peggy Dietel and Jean Howerton. It would grow and grow.

It has almost overwhelmed the three of them, carrying hundreds more along to a band reunion that will span 60 years of music and pull home ex-students scattered all over the United States.

Texas City High School Band Alumni were soon organized. Planning committees were formed, and grew.

Long lists of names and addresses were compiled — with a big help from Wayne Pearson, who edits an ex-student paper called Stingaree Tales.

Old annuals were combed for more names and pictures.

The walls of the band hall — in the throes of a remodeling project — were robbed of portraits.

There were meetings and more meetings. "We ended up sending out more than 1,000 letters," said White-Jones. Planners have corresponded with people in Florida, Ohio, California, and as far away as Japan.

And on Sept. 6, following a big dinner at Nessler Center, band alumni will join present members of the Texas City High School Band on the field for a marching show to end all marching shows.

"We are expecting somewhere between 500 and 1,000 ex-students," White-Jones said. "I had no idea it would get this big, or this involved." White-Jones said she has spent several hours every day working on the project, totting a big notebook, six scribbles-in-progress and a huge stack of annuals with her everywhere she goes.

"It's going to be the biggest band you ever saw," adds Tom SoRelle, now in his 16th year as director of the TCHS band.

Old timers will do "Swinging on Parade." They also plan to do "Dixie," and if Hannibal Marvin Peterson shows up from New York. "We are certainly going to feature him," SoRelle said.

Marchers will have attended practice for five Thursdays by the time the big event rolls around. And not to be outdone, ex-dancers will have been practicing, too. (The Stingaretes used to be members of the band, until requirements were changed several years back.)

Many former drum majors and twirlers will also be on hand. Drum majors for the alumni night march will be Randy Hunter, who was assistant drum major for the first high school band in 1939, and Dale Bailey Brannon, who was drum major in 1960.

"The two years before 1939, Texas City had a municipal band. We even have pictures of them," White-Jones said.

Former band leaders Wade Pogue, who directed from 1950-53 and Robert Renfro, who was with TCHS for 35 years, will be on hand for the celebration.

"In the glory years of the 50s and 60s, Texas City was one of the most famous bands in the United States," said SoRelle.

"They were the first to have private lessons. The first to travel nationwide."

The tradition of greatness has continued, he noted. The band has won eight Sweepstakes awards in the last 10 years and continues to be invited to many important events.

"The kids work hard and put in a lot of time," he said. "I tell them all the time how important what they are doing is to the whole community."

"When they see all the alumni come back to relive their band days, then they will know what I have been saying is true. Our motto is 'Music is for a lifetime' and these people are proving that to be true," he said.

SoRelle said band teaches many things besides music, like responsibility, teamwork and loyalty. "I wish all the students could be a part of band," he said.

To that end, the band program in Texas City, with a total of six instructors, puts more of the teachers in Blocker Middle School so band members can learn music well and stay with it. Each person teaches his speciality, be it brass or percussion.



TCHS band director Tom SoRelle joins reunion organizer Barbara White-Jones in showing off an alumni shirt which will be part of the reunion.

By the time they get to high school, they are expected to march and perform. They must already know how to play," SoRelle said.

In addition to strutting their stuff and making a gigantic nostalgia trip, members of the Band Alumni Association also plan to help present and future band members by defraying some instrument costs for youngsters who can't afford to pay for instruments, yet want to play in the band.

"We plan to take up a little slack when we can," White-Jones said. They'll also be taking up slack in those marching lines, come halftime on Sep. 6.



WADE POGUE, ROBERT RENFRO AND TOM SoRELLE
During an era where band directors come and go, Texas City High School has only had three.

Link to
Picture