



MARKOCH MASTERPIECE



Beloved band director marks 30th year at Athens Drive High School

By CLIFTON BARNES

Jerry Markoch always thought his son would be an engineer.

Jerry was himself an engineer and little Jerry made straight A's in math and liked to build things with Legos, Tinker Toys and Tonka trucks.

But little Jerry started playing guitar when he was in the fourth grade. With his mom Elizabeth - who had been a beautician and was now a stay-at-home mom - listening to the classical sounds of Mantovani and Arthur Fielder, little Jerry developed an appreciation of that style of music.

Then he joined the band in high school, played the tuba, and liked it. He even played music in church and gave guitar lessons. His dad believed it was just a hobby. Little Jerry would still be an engineer, he thought.

During his senior year at his northeastern Ohio high school near Akron, little Jerry mustered the nerve to tell big Jerry and his mother that he wanted to be a music educator - a band teacher. He told his father, "I don't have the passion to do engineering." To their credit, despite their surprise, both his parents supported his decision. After all, he did have the passion for music and for teaching it to kids.

It was a calling that pulled him like the strongest gravitational force. And nearly 44 years later - 38 of which have been spent teaching music and 30 of which have been spent as band director of Athens Drive High School - teaching music to kids is still his passion.

It's rare that a band director spends 30 years in one spot. In fact, Markoch is currently the longest serving high school band director in Wake County. Despite still having that passion, it's unlikely that Markoch will break the record of 34 straight years that Jeffrey Richardson spent as director of bands at Broughton High School.

"I think I have a lot of conducting and teaching left inside," Markoch said. "I have enjoyed every bit of it and continue to enjoy it but I can tell deep inside me there's a bit of weariness after doing it year after year after year. I don't want to go out on any note other than a very positive note."

Therefore, Markoch lobbied for and received an assistant band director, who is scheduled to start next school year. "I want to make sure that when I hand off the program, it's fantastic and people aren't saying 'he was slipping the last couple of years,'" he said. "It's time for this program to have a breath of fresh air. It would be healthy for the kids and this band program to have something new - somebody who comes in with a few new dreams and wants to take our really solid foundation to new levels."

Before he retires though, he wants to make sure the band program is on solid footing - a luxury he didn't have when he started at Athens Drive in 1994.

In the 1980s, the band had some notable success playing at the Peach Bowl, playing for Presidents Reagan and Bush, and for being the state's representative in Washington for the bicentennial celebration of the signing of the U.S. Constitution.

But that band director left to go into administration and his successor quit midyear of 1994 in the midst of a personal crisis. The program was without a band director for the last four to five months of the school year.

"It was horrible - a nightmare," Markoch said. "It was in absolute shambles. Had I known how bad it was, I might not have taken the job. But the administration was great and the parents were great and the kids cared - but they were so distraught."

And the numbers had dwindled. It was June of 1994 and only 18 students were signed up for band for the following school year. "The hiring of Jerry was unusual to say the least," said Walt Sherlin, the principal who hired Markoch and who still lives in Raleigh.

Sherlin said he had heard about Markoch from the school system's arts director and he was surprised when Markoch, who was finishing his doctorate at LSU, agreed to come to Raleigh for an interview in July.

He first interviewed with the assistant principals since Sherlin was on a yearly family vacation. He stayed at Sherlin's house and an assistant principal took him to school to meet parents and students.

"Surprisingly, Jerry agreed to take the job," Sherlin said. "I figured he would stay a year or two at best and then head off to a college. But at least I had a band teacher who could start in a few weeks."

There were only enough students signed up to qualify for a half-time teaching position. "But I knew Jerry wouldn't come for a half-time position so I hired him full time," Sherlin said. Markoch only taught a couple of periods a day but he ended up offering guitar lessons at lunch and spending time with band teachers and students at nearby middle schools.

While there was a very small marching band that first year, by year two Markoch had greatly increased the number of students enrolled, Sherlin said. "Some band teachers teach band," he said. "Jerry taught music and had a band."

While everyone loved Markoch, Sherlin still felt that he would leave at any moment. "I was thrilled he stayed as long as I was principal," he said. "He built an incredible program that's known throughout the state. I never, ever thought he would make a 30-year career out of it."

Markoch didn't either.

After being the valedictorian at the University of Akron in 1985, where he graduated with a bachelor's in Music Education, he taught three years at Manchester (Ohio) High School, during which time he got married to his childhood sweetheart and fellow band member Susan. While it was exhausting going from school to school, he enjoyed teaching 5th through 12th graders. But he wanted more.

He studied under renowned director Mark Kelly at Bowling Green State University where he received his master's in Music Education in 1991. But he wanted more.

He wanted that doctorate. So he went to Louisiana State University to get it.

By this time, he was playing all sorts of instruments besides classical guitar including baritone, trombone, euphonium and tuba. However, during his time at LSU, he developed focal dystonia, a neurological disorder that caused involuntary muscle contractions in his lips.

He could no longer play certain notes so he backed off that and got into conducting and playing piano. While he was well rounded, many colleges were looking for a full package that perhaps included playing low-brass instruments and having a connection to the college.

"If I kept my tuba chops, I may have gotten a college job but sometimes things happen for a reason," said Markoch, who applied to many colleges.

"My professors and I had a good conversation and they said I was ideal for high school - with my energy level, exuberance and passion," he said. "It had been five years since I did high school and I knew I liked it. I had learned a lot since so I said, 'let's see if I can do this.'"

Within a week after making that decision, he got a call from Raleigh, which at that time had been hailed as the No. 1 place to live in the United States. "It was a rocky road the first year but by the end of the first year it's amazing how things cleaned up and people started really getting behind what I was doing. I could feel that energy and it just got better and better," he said.

It was also the year Markoch got his nickname. He officially got his doctorate from LSU after he passed his defense in March of 1995. "After Spring Break I told the kids, 'you can call me doctor. I'm a doctor now.' They said, 'Ok, Doc.' They asked immediately if they could call me 'Doc.' And I told them as long as you do it respectfully. And they never looked back."

Now decades of students, thousands of them, know him simply as "Doc."

Doc and his students have been through quite a lot together over the 30 years - mostly fun and accomplishments.

They've performed at Carnegie Hall, the Philadelphia Thanksgiving Day parade, the national Memorial Day parade twice, several Disney World parades and various national festivals.

For more than two decades, the band has received "superior" ratings - the highest level of music - from the North Carolina State Band Festivals. Several times the band has played at the state music convention in front of all the band directors in the state and have been named "a model program."

The marching band has earned grand championships and first place showings at competitions in seven different states. Taking part in about five marching band competitions per year, the band has collected hundreds of first place awards in various categories and dozens of grand champion overall winner awards.

Individually, many students have gone on to perform in the all-state band, the U.S. Army All-American Marching Band and, later, in college bands and ensembles - many on scholarship. Countless students have been inducted into music honor societies. After

high school, students have gone on to become professional musicians, music teachers, college professors and band directors themselves.

Markoch - let's call him Doc now - has won numerous honors including teacher of the year, band director of the year, various awards of excellence and the prestigious Jackson Parkhurst Award for Special Achievement by the North Carolina Symphony.

Don't let Doc fool you - those band and individual accomplishments mean a great deal to him. But it's not what drives him.

"Competition. Awards. I get it but it's very dangerous. It's not the real reason we do what we do," he said. "It's unhealthy - kids burn out and get a jaded view of what music is. Our kids get it - they love playing."

Athens Drive has a very balanced music program. In addition to the marching band, there's the wind ensemble, the symphonic band, the concert band, the jazz ensemble, indoor percussion and winterguard. "More programs are adopting this model," Doc said. "They're starting to realize if you put all your eggs in the marching basket - which is showy and cosmetic and sometimes preaches competition - it takes away from the joy of playing music."

Doc said it's inherently fun to play a music instrument and he wants to make it even more fun. In order to do that, the students need to play well. He credits the parents - the band boosters - for raising 99 percent of what it takes to pay the long-serving assistants (such as John Antonelli, who has been the director of percussion since 2007) and visiting instructors to make that possible.

"I strongly believe that the better you play, the more you're going to love band and stay with it," he said. "I wanted a band program that at its core, the students play their instruments really well and that they love to play, to make music," he said. "It's not about trophies and not even about the marching and all the props. They have to love to play their instrument. If they love that, everything else will grow around it."

The students and Doc have fun even when not playing music - from the inside jokes during class or rehearsals to the trips they share.

It brings a smile to his face as he reminisces about the time band members paid for him to do a bungee jump at Six Flags Over Georgia and when the band did push ups on the top of a mountain while at band competition at Western Carolina.

And he could never forget when the band had some extra time during a competition in Havelock. "We performed in the morning and the awards weren't until night so we took the band to Atlantic Beach, Fort Macon," he remembered. "I said 'Let's form a block. We're gonna march on the beach.' They had so much fun doing our marching exercises. We were in bare feet marching on the beach and everybody was looking at us. They had such a good time - they loved it."

After all, ya gotta love it. That's a phrase that has become synonymous with Doc. Like many "Docisms" - such as "It's All Good" and "Make Your Life a Masterpiece" - the words were borrowed.

"When I was in my college marching band in Ohio there was a little bass drummer named Anthony. He was a small guy but he carried the biggest bass drum," Doc said. "The band director would say 'get back to set one' or something like that and he'd run back with this big bass drum and he'd say 'Ya Gotta Love It, Let's Go.' We all kinda chuckled and jogged back. He did that all the time.

"During my first band camp with Athens, which was the first week I ever saw the kids, I said, 'Ya Gotta Love It, Let's get back,' and the kids laughed and it caught on just like that," he said with a laugh.

Ever since, it's been a fun way to foster camaraderie and share in the grueling tasks

necessary to keep going in order to be good. All the fun came to a screeching halt in 2020.

On the heels of some impressive appearances and competitions, and after working the number of marching band members up to 165, the largest it had ever been, came COVID-19.

"Things were humming along perfectly," Doc said. "We had all cylinders running and all of a sudden everything shut down. The pandemic was a disaster. It was an unbelievable tragedy. I remember I'd never use the term 'It's all good' anymore. I felt like everything was upside down. I couldn't believe what was happening. I didn't know what to say. I was there for the kids but it was remote. For a program like Athens where we start kids sometime from scratch, it was tough. The middle school programs took it even worse. Everything fractured."

Once back in school, Athens Drive was the first school in the county to field a performing marching band - that was in the spring of 2021. "Some didn't want to do marching band because there were no competitions," Doc said. "They said 'why do marching band?' and I said 'you're upside down.' We always did it because we loved to do it, not for competition. This was proof that we were in it for the right reasons."

He credits the upperclassmen with helping teach and inspire the younger kids and then-principal Steve Mares for helping the band make it through the pandemic. "He held our hand throughout all this," Doc said. "But we have started back from scratch. We are teaching kids to play instruments. Three years later, the quality is getting closer and closer but we're still recovering numbers wise. It's going to take a while."

Despite the challenges of the pandemic and the aftermath, Mares said Doc has been able to keep a family atmosphere where the students feel welcomed, accepted and inspired. "He provides opportunities for students to not only grow their musical talents, but also develop leadership and communication skills that will last his students a lifetime," Mares said. "He has created an award-winning band program that is a model for other schools and a positive example of teaching and learning."

For a long time, Doc has incorporated character-building techniques he's learned but he didn't start his "Doc Talks" until after COVID. "I started talking to the kids more from my heart at the beginning of every rehearsal," he said.

"I'd put a little quote up on the board and we'd talk. The kids asked, 'Could you do that everyday? We kinda like it.' I was stunned. So I started sharing Doc Talks, I guess it came from Ted Talks, but I do it everyday with the kids."

He doesn't want to come off as trying to be Socrates or Yoda even but he said he is an avid reader of biographies and history plus he has "a lot of tread on me."

To those who know Doc, you'd probably guess his biggest collection of earthly possessions might be golf related as he's been playing nearly every moment he can since taking up the sport 16 years ago - often playing with current or former band members. But his collection of books - which looks like a library - beats his golf items.

Espousing what he's learned from those books to inspire his students to be good people and good parents probably gives him at least as much joy as the music. "I'm proud of the way we teach the whole student. Character through music," he said.

Whether it was because of their character or simply their love for Doc, 60 band members carpooled to Goldsboro in 2022 to help Doc surprise his daughter Caroline with a full-uniform performance of "Sweet Caroline" at her wedding.



Dr. Markoch conducting at the 2023 graduation

(Athens Drive Band SmugMug)

Doc makes it a wonderful life for all

Jerry “Doc” Markoch will never have to go through what George Bailey did to find out that it’s a wonderful life. He’s often reminded of the mutual love and respect between him and Athens Drive band parents - current and past - and band students - current and past.

“A lot of the kids come back and say ‘Doc, I still use the lessons I learned in band, in my workforce, in my family,’” Markoch said, who is completing his 30th year as band director at Athens Drive High School. “Many elementary school teachers have come out of this program and they tell me they do ‘Doc’ things every day with their kids. They’ll say, ‘Ya Gotta Love It,’ and I smile.”

Markoch said he’s also gratified that he has always enjoyed the interactions with the band boosters. “I’ve always gotten along with the parents,” Markoch said. “I love the parents. Every generation, we’ve had key parents that happen to be in the right place at the right time to do what is needed.”

One of those parents was Dr. Frank Castlebury, a psychologist, who donated the “Home of the Athens Band” sign on the side of the school building.

“Doc created a ‘home’ for all who participated,” said Castlebury, whose daughter Tessa, he remembers, grew not only as a musician but also as a self-aware, confident person. “My daughter and I were facing some difficult circumstances in our lives as she entered high school. We needed a ‘home’ and the band program was the perfect place for us both.”

Castlebury and his daughter are grateful that they were in the band program all four years of high school. “When we see Doc now, he greets us like we are always a part of that home - like we never left,” he said. “The truth is, this home with Doc and the band program will live in our hearts forever. On top of all that, when I think about those four years at Athens, it was just plain fun!”

There was a “fun” tradition that band members took part in that went on for 15 years - perhaps 14 more than Markoch wanted. “One night after the Raleigh Christmas parade, we had a luncheon and that night they toilet papered my house,” Markoch said. He walked out and saw band members scurrying and peaking out from behind cars and trees. He told them it was going to rain that night so they said they’d clean it up but they wanted some hot chocolate first. “Then they cleaned up everything before the rain,” he said with a laugh. “The next year they did the same thing - toilet paper, hot chocolate and then clean up. That went on for 15 years.”

One family who likely had multiple members take part in that tradition was the Herring family. “We have four daughters that have all been in class band and marching band with Doc,” Kim Herring said. “The Herring family has been with Doc for 14 years, almost half of his time at Athens.” Katie was in the band program from Fall 2010 to Spring 2013. Celia was in the band from Fall 2010 to Spring 2014. Grace was in the band from Fall 2015 to Spring 2019. And finally, Mary Blake has been in the band from Fall 2020 to Spring 2024.

“As a parent, Doc’s presence at Athens has provided me comfort,” Herring said. “I have always known that if my daughters needed anything during the school day, they could go to the band room. There they would find Doc and a warm, welcoming space.”

The four daughters also developed strong friendships during their band years. Third daughter Grace said, “Some of the people that I was in band with at Athens are still some of my best friends today.”

And it all started for the Herring family when oldest daughter Katie wanted to join

the band. There was just one catch. She hadn’t played a band instrument. But that was not a problem for Markoch. “He assured me that Katie was most welcomed, and enthusiastically said she could learn the instrument of her choice under his leadership,” Herring said, adding that Katie was awarded “most improved” by the end of the school year.

“I take whoever comes in the door,” Markoch said, noting that Athens Drive doesn’t have a natural feeder school for middle school band members. “I learned early on that if I set a bar too high, I won’t have a band. Also, I learned that high school kids are capable of learning so fast.”

He said there is more growth from Athens Drive band students than any school in the area. “What we get coming in versus what we have coming out is astronomically different,” he said. “These kids that come out of here are really, really fine players, good musicians with good heads on their shoulders.”

He pointed to one boy who came into the program a few years ago without ever having played a band instrument and by the time he was a senior, he was one of the best players of his instrument that he ever heard in high school. “I’m still astounded that he just started in high school,” Markoch said. “I have seen so many miracles.”

Some may think the journey of the current marching and brass instructor for Athens’ marching band is a miracle, including

Colin Lanier himself. When he was in high school, Lanier, who graduated in 2014, said that Markoch motivated him to make something out of his life.

“He inspired me to work hard and taught me to be a leader,” Lanier said. “When I joined the Athens Drive Band, I made Cs and Ds in

school and was always getting into trouble.” But by his senior year, Lanier was band captain and he received a full college scholarship. Every year he uses his personal story to inspire band students who have various challenges.

“Hundreds of students have come and gone since I’ve been here. Thousands of pieces of music have been played,” said Lanier, who has had a part in 15 of Markoch’s 30 years at the helm. “Something that has been consistent in this program is Doc. He has always been here. The best thing I can say about Doc is that it has always been about the students, and not just some of the students.”

It’s also been about keeping a solid staff together, said Lanier, adding that he’s thankful to have gained great friends as a result. Markoch has kept Lanier, Malakhi Smith, Jennifer Mason Harris and John Antonelli together as staff instructors for more than five years.

Antonelli, who has been the director of percussion since 2007, wasn’t a student under Markoch like the others but he has greatly influenced his life as well. “He’s been a mentor and friend to me,” Antonelli said. “He’s seen me through many crazy instances of life and always been there for me - for issues that have come up in the classroom as well as outside random things in life.”

Antonelli said that Markoch is always supportive of his staff, standing behind them and not micromanaging them. “I’m forever grateful to him for allowing me to work here so long and letting me do what I want with the percussion section,” he said. “He trusts his staff to do what’s right. That being said, he’s also very available if issues arise.”

Many wonder how Markoch is always available. “Doc has incredible energy and works extremely long days, Friday night games and Saturday competitions,” said Mary Moyer, who had two boys - Andrew and Joseph - in the program from 2001 to



Dr. Markoch and his Grand Champions - 2022 Greene Central Band Day (Athens Drive Band SmugMug)

2007. “By demonstrating his passion for music and working hard toward the very best performances, the students saw his immense dedication daily.”

Markoch ingrained a love of music and performance into her sons, who went on to high-profile marching band careers. Joseph was a member of the N.C. State University marching band for four years and served as drum major for his last two. Andrew was a member of the Auburn University marching band for four years and served as section leader.

“Doc has a passion for college football on Saturdays,” she said, noting that he’s a big LSU fan. In 2007, Markoch took his son Ben to an intense LSU-Auburn rivalry game in Baton Rouge. “Of course, Doc headed to the Auburn band seats to find Andrew and say ‘Hi,’” Moyer said. “LSU beat Auburn in the final seconds on a pass caught right in front of Doc and Ben - which we heard about for years.”

It’s not unusual for Markoch’s former students to go on to play music in college and beyond. For instance, several have become band directors themselves - including Kevin Still at nearby Willow Spring High School and Brian Holtshouser at far away Killeen (Texas) High School.

“Doc was my favorite teacher and he is the reason I pursued music education after high school,” Holtshouser said. “He gave me opportunities to teach and direct parts of the band as a senior, and that’s really where I found the passion for it.”

After college, Holtshouser continued to look to Markoch for inspiration and motivation. “I often think about how Doc would have handled certain situations, and what he would really want his students to gain out of their time in band,” he said. “Four years of high school is only such a short time of a person’s life, but hopefully the lessons we teach can last a lifetime.”

Laurie Cockman, whose daughter Emma went on to the UNC marching band two years ago and whose son Jacob is still in the band as a rising junior, agrees. “My first impression of Doc at our initial high school visit was that he was THAT teacher. He was genuine. He was positive. He was unbelievably enthusiastic,” said Cockman, who served two terms as band boosters president. “It was clear that he was one of those rare teachers that a student would always remember, that would make a lasting impact, that would help shape their future.”

One student whose entire career trajectory changed while at Athens Drive was Kelley Harrell who changed her career choice from

something science related to being a music therapist. “He took my daughter’s interest in music and turned it into a passion,” said Susan Harrell, who is still involved in support of the band though her daughter graduated in 2017 and lives in Minnesota. “He personally knows each of his students by name, their individual interests in music and life, as well as their strengths and personal areas of challenge. My daughter’s story is similar to others, which demonstrates the effect of his teachings and philosophies.”

Angie Wright has a similar story. Her twin girls - Lauren and Nicole - joined the band after getting to know Doc while their older sister (Heather) was in the color guard. They went on to be in college marching bands at N.C. State and East Carolina. Nicole got a double major in music education and music therapy at ECU and a master’s degree in music therapy from Colorado State University.

“Doc is such a strong positive influence on the students that pass through his program,” said Wright, who was a band booster for six years through 2009. “He always has a smile and attitude to match. He instills manners, self-confidence, respect for others and themselves in his students. He continually praises them and builds them up. Doc always looks for the good in his students. Even when they might have misbehaved a little, he says, ‘band students are always good kids.’”

Wright said that she and her family still quote Doc and talk about him often. “He touched our lives in so many ways that will never be forgotten,” she said. “I don’t think he understands what a hero he is to others. He is truly one in a million.”

While many rarely see Markoch anymore, former student Scott Sweeney, who owns an instrument repair shop in Raleigh, says he’s fortunate to still interact regularly with him. “Doc has a nearly standing appointment to drop by my shop on Friday afternoons with a few horns for repairs,” said Sweeney, who Markoch calls one of the best repair guys in the country. “It’s nice to see Doc every time he comes by. He’s always talking about the kids and how great they are doing and how well the band program is progressing. He’s always working for the betterment of others and works hard to make it happen.”

One of the first to experience Markoch’s work ethic was Emily Nicholson, who became a band booster at the beginning of his second year at Athens and was band president in 1997-1998. Markoch leaned heavily on the parents to help build the program and match his energy level.

Despite early financial struggles, Nicholson said, the boosters made flags and color guard uniforms, props and sets of Sherwood Forest for a Robin Hood theme, and remodeled a donated bus to allow the band to move equipment to the practice field and competitions.

In what is believed to be Markoch’s first competition success at Athens, during his second year, the band went to Danville, Va. and came home with first place in all categories within their classification, Nicholson said.

“Jerry always instilled in the kids that winning competitions was not the most important thing,” she said. “More important was being a good person, being part of the band and doing your best. I’ve always admired that.”

She said she has run into Markoch over the years at Christmas parades, concerts, the Dewey’s store and the Christmas tree lighting at Waverly. “He’s still the same Doc!” she said.

“When you first meet Doc, his boundless energy and joyful attitude are immediately noticeable,” said Corey Benson, who has two children that have gone through the Athens band program and one that’s on the way.

“We never hesitated on which high school Gracyn would attend,” Benson said of his incoming freshman next year. She has been exposed to the band program since she was four years old. “It was always Athens Drive so that she could experience the same life-changing years as her brother (Bryan) and sister (Emily) with Doc and this wonderful band family.”

Bryan went on to get a master of music in performance degree with the bassoon. “The love for music that Doc imparted on Bryan and the solid foundation of music from the band program has set the stage for the journey that Bryan is on,” he said.

While many in the program have gone on to become professional musicians and teachers, many more have had success in business, IT and other fields. “I can think of several people in the band around my time who went on to teach music like me,” Holtshouser said, “but even more who went on to become doctors, pilots, engineers, computer programmers, lawyers, etc. I know, and they know, that part of their success can be attributed to the things they learned from being in band with Doc.”

Even those who have very little or no direct contact with Jerry “Doc” Markoch understand. The Herring girls’ grandmother, Tricia Blakeley, went to many Athens Drive band concerts and always enjoyed listening to the positive, upbeat comments from Markoch. Every time she left a performance, she said the same thing - “What a wonderful person he is!”

And what a wonderful life - or translated to Doc talk, “ya gotta love it.” - Clifton Barnes

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“That may be the most tender, fun, beautiful moment of my life. I’ll never forget the love I felt,” he said, adding that the fact that Emily Schmidt, who had been one of Caroline’s dance students, was the drum major made it even more special. “It was everything I wanted in a band. Classy, well-done, fun, cheerful.”

As he realizes his time as band director is coming to an end, he has become more melancholy and thinks back on special moments he’s enjoyed like conducting his son Ben’s clarinet solo with his daughter in color guard dancing next to him during the band’s Rhapsody in Blue show.

While he’s committed to his band family, he’s been thinking more and more about his immediate family. “I’ve perhaps been most proud that I’ve been able to keep a very, very good marriage and raise two beautiful children while being a band director here.

That’s not easy. It’s a time-demanding job and my family has been so supportive,” he said.

“I do need to scale back for my family, my wife and we’re going to be having grandchildren, I’m sure, in the next couple of years.”

When he does retire, he’d like to come back part time as director emeritus, and the administration and the new assistant director seem supportive of that notion.

“I would be the grandfather, the godfather, the guardian angel,” he said. “My blood’s in this program and I want to continue to make it good. But when I let it go, I let it go. I’m not making the big calls but I would be an adviser and be a help to the kids. I love giving.”

That love for giving and the enthusiasm he displays are God-given gifts, he said, and

this journey was one that God sent him on.

Never one at a loss for words, Doc thinks long and deliberately when discussing what he wants his legacy to be.

“A really beautiful well-rounded program is my legacy along with enthusiastic kids that have great character. The kids will always be my legacy more than the music,” he said.

“One time I was in the beautiful home of a band parent. He was a builder and he was showing the band parents all the stuff he built - inlaid bookshelves and an incredible patio. I wondered what I had built that I could show. I looked at the kids and I thought, that’s what I built. I built them - I built their passion for life and for each other and their love of music.”

Turns out little Jerry Markoch’s dad was right after all. His son did become an engineer - a people builder.



Dr. Markoch and Caroline at 2021 Cary Christmas Parade (Athens Drive Band SmugMug)