

A Spotlight On . . . Band Boosters

A Narrative About the Closeness of the Band Community

Gary Wells, Phi Beta Mu Executive Secretary

This story is based on an interview by Gary Wells with band director Dr. Barry Wayne Johnson.

This story centers on Pattie Johnson, wife of Dr. Barry Wayne Johnson. Barry was a long time band director in several districts and finished his career at Lamar University where he eventually entered the administration, retiring as Vice President for Student Affairs. I have known Barry and Pattie since August of 1964 when I entered Sam Houston State University as an awkward, shy and frightened freshman. They took me under their wing and helped the “boy from the sticks” succeed in the higher education environment.

We kept in touch through the years and various job changes. We both settled in Southeast Texas where he taught both my children at Lamar and we became familiar with Mike Barnes as a student at Hardin-Jefferson High School and then at Lamar.

Mike became the director at Ridge Point High School in the Fort Bend ISD in the fall of 2011 and immediately felt that he was not achieving the desired “band culture” at his school. He called on Barry, who had by then retired, for his assistance and Barry worked with Mike and the Ridge Point Band through the spring of 2012 and the atmosphere improved dramatically.

Fast forward to early 2015 when Pattie began to have health issues, seemingly neurologically-based, but ill-defined by their local physicians. Pattie’s doctor eventually suspected Parkinson’s disease and referred them

to Houston. Some of the symptoms of Parkinson’s include difficulty walking, stiff or aching muscles, tremors, and difficulty with speech or writing. Pattie exhibited some of these but not in the usual manner, making diagnosis problematic.

Barry and Pattie were staying in Katy in their motor home in order to be close to their son, Michael Johnson. On February 19, Pattie had to be transported to the Houston Methodist West Hospital in Katy. Pattie’s primary physician was Dr. Nyugen. After she was admitted, he set about to definitively diagnosis her condition and improve her mobility so that she would be able to leave the hospital. The daily routine was rehab type activities and various medical tests, none of which were conclusive. During this time Barry stayed with Pattie in the hospital.

After a week Pattie was transferred to Memorial Hermann Rehabilitation Hospital in Katy. It is hospital policy that a discharge date is established upon admittance so that there is a clearly defined goal for the patient and family. This date was March 14. Pattie’s daily schedule revolved around rehab and evaluation and she gradually gained strength and mobility. The band director “grapevine” brought news of the Johnson’s plight to the attention of Mike Barnes. He visited them around March 10 and inquired of their plans on discharge since Pattie would still

have to have doctor appointments and rehab sessions at least twice a week. As many of us have experienced with elderly parents or friends, Barry had become absorbed with the day-to-day activities of Pattie’s health care and



had not given much thought to their next destination.

When Mike was visiting them, they discussed options concerning where to go after Pattie’s hospital discharge. Options discussed were staying with Michael, going back to the motor home, and/or going home to Village Mills. Staying with Michael was out of the question because he lives in a second floor apartment. The motor home was not an option because Pattie could not get in and out of the motor home. Commuting two and a half hours one way from Village Mills to Houston twice a week was not sustainable. Mike rather cryptically said, “You have another option.” Pattie was discharged on March 14 to begin outpatient rehab.

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Mike's Option

Mike offered his home in Sugar Land to the Johnsons for as long as needed for Pattie to achieve the mobility and strength needed to return home. Mike has a two story home and he moved to the second story and turned the master suite on the bottom floor over to Barry and Pattie to use. Barry was able, through the help of a high level hospital administrator, to have Pattie's outpatient care transferred to TIRR Memorial Hermann Outpatient Rehabilitation Hospital in Sugar Land. The Johnson's daily schedule centered on at least twice weekly rehab sessions and continued diagnostic testing with her physician.

During Mike's visit to the Johnson's he had stealthily inquired if they had food allergies. The reason for this became apparent when Mike's Ridge Point Band Boosters began delivering meals to the Johnsons two to three times per week, always with more than enough food to last until the next delivery. The use of Mike's home near the rehab

hospital and the "food train" continued until Pattie was released on Memorial Day. Pattie's rehab had helped her gain strength and mobility so that they could return to their Village Mills home.

The Band Booster in charge of the food for the Johnsons was Christy Stephens. On one of the many occasions that Barry thanked her for all that she was doing, she replied, "You helped Mike and our band when we needed it". Side note – during this time Christy was engaged to and eventually married one of Barry and Pattie's former Woodville students.

I hope you join me in saluting Mike Barnes and the Ridge Point Band Boosters for their overwhelming support of Pattie and Barry. What a great example the Ridge Point people are to their students! To me, this is why I think we are in the greatest profession with the greatest people and why band is so important to the lives of our youth.