



## History of the Prime Time (50+ Dream) Band

### Part I: The First Five Years<sup>1</sup>

By Lou Dartanner

#### 1995: In the Beginning

It all started in 1995 when George Pendergast, retired tour bus driver, saw a story on the “Today” show and read an article in the *Santa Barbara News-Press* about Dr. Roy Ernst and the New Horizons Bands<sup>2</sup> program for people over 50.

Intrigued, George contacted Dr. Ernst to determine how a New Horizons Band could be started in Santa Barbara. “You need two things,” said Dr. Ernst. “A director and a place to play.”

George knew exactly the person to contact: J.B. “Van” Vander Ark, retired music director for La Colina Junior High School, who had been his son’s music teacher. Van eagerly accepted the challenge and the school agreed to allow use of their band room. Presto! A director and a place to play!

Van and George enlisted the help of a third: Nick Rail, owner of Nick Rail Music. He agreed to rent instruments to those who needed them and sponsor the band financially for a few years and provide other services.

The Band was chartered as the 13<sup>th</sup> New Horizons Band. However, since there was a New Horizons retirement community in the Santa Barbara area, they chose a new name to avoid confusion: The Prime Time 50 Plus Dream Band.

An article in the *News-Press* recruiting interested potential band members brought about 20 people to the informational meetings held in June and July. Eager to get started, the group began instruction in August. About half of those attending hadn’t even held an instrument; others had not played since high school or played a

different instrument than the one they wanted to learn. So, the first challenge for most was to learn how to play – from note one.

Van enlisted the assistance of Jim Mooy (trumpets), Karen Dutton (flutes), Nancy Mathison (reeds), and Carolyn Teroaka-Brady (percussion) while Van taught lower brass. The instructors took their students to separate rooms and areas to practice. To make learning a new instrument as easy as possible, the players started in the simplest musical key for that instrument (not the same key for every one).



Of course, before you can play your instrument, you have to learn certain things, such as how to put it together; the names of the parts; and even how to hold it. But most importantly: how to get a sound out of it! Which, for some instruments, isn’t as easy as it sounds.



The group was soon eager and ready to rehearse together for the first time. So, the same month they started, together they huffed and puffed and played “Mary Had A Little Lamb” – in five different keys! But they started together, played the correct notes, and ended together! (However, 20 years later, Carol Anderson (flute) said that while it may have looked like they were playing, none of them was getting a sound out of their flutes that evening!)

Their next challenge was learning to read music, which they met with eagerness and hard work.



This group of Prime Time Band Charter members included: J. B. Vander Ark, conductor; Flute: Carol Anderson, Erlene Covert, Nancy Harvey, Barbara McClintok, Karen Payatt, and Shirley Ruklic; oboe: Tricia Gilman; Clarinet: Rosie Chansky, Ken Gates, Edward Harris, Jim Harvey, Laureen Lewis, Alice Marie McFarland, Jack Ochi, George Potter, George Solinas, Lorraine Vander Ark, and Leora Williams; alto saxophone: Dick Nielsen; French horn: June Denney and Marion Moreno; trumpet: Don Bennett, Dick Curtis, Leonard Pacheco, and Bill Straka; trombone: Roger Anderson, George Pendergast, Lee Schmedes, and Don Seth; percussion: Cata de la Pena, Penny Perry, and Gertrude Johnson. By December, their numbers had reached 55.

Van emphasized to the group that it was important for them to relax and have fun and not to worry about trying to play every single note. “If you play the first note of each measure, that’s OK!” During one rehearsal, trombone player Roger Anderson said to another: “How many notes did you get?” Lee Schmedes’ reply: “How many did you get?” “I got about half,” said Roger. “Well, I got the other half!” declared Lee.

Amazingly enough, only a few months after they had started playing, on December 5<sup>th</sup>, 1995, 50 members gave their first formal concert at La

Colina Junior High School before about 300 relatives and friends. And it wasn’t a program of nursery rhyme songs. They played a formal concert program of eleven pieces, including marches, a Christmas carol featuring a flute trio, a German dance played by a clarinet sextet, Mendelssohn’s Nocturne by a brass quintet, a hoedown, and a Christmas medley. They wore their new white tee shirts with the band’s logo, courtesy of Nick Rail. Concert programs were distributed to those in attendance.

### 1996: Playing Music in the Community

It didn’t take them long to take their show on the road! On May 2<sup>nd</sup>, about 30 members of the Band made their first public performance in front of the Chromatic Gates on East Beach for the Olympic Torch Run ceremonies.



Van conducts the Band in front of the Chromatic Gates

They also played at six other venues in the community, including Manning Park, The Samarkand, Noches de Ronda in the Courthouse Sunken Garden, Pilgrim Terrace, the Masonic Lodge, and La Cumbre Plaza.



Jim Mooy conducts the Band at Manning Park on June 8<sup>th</sup>.



Van joins the Band on chairs near the pool at The Samarkand Retirement Community on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July.

Marilyn McMahon wrote a very nice article, "Strike Up The Band," for the *Santa Barbara News-Press* in January, 1996, which resulted in a number of calls from people interested in joining the Band.

Band members worked hard preparing for their first Summer Concert on Tuesday, June 25<sup>th</sup> at La Colina Junior High School. Held at 7:30 p.m., 77 members played for family and friends. Their program featured marches, overtures, and familiar songs like *Tuxedo Junction*, *Mame/Hello Dolly*, and *If I Were A Rich Man*.

Leonard Pacheco (trumpet), wrote the music and words for the Band's theme song, "*The Prime Time Fifty-Plus Dream Band*" (see page 8), and Sam Kimbel (baritone) arranged the piece. It was first played at the Summer 1996 concert. Sam also wrote music for "*Royal Birthday Greetings*" for the band to play for members celebrating a birthday.

Dues were \$75 a quarter, with checks made out to the Band but mailed to Nick Rail, who was the "finance officer" for the group. All New Horizons Bands are self-funded.

Band members soon began working on music for their Second Winter Concert. On December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 80 Band members played 13 songs, including *An Irish Interlude*, *I'll Be Home For Christmas*, *Waltz of the Flowers*, *Big Name Band*, *The Pink Panther*, several marches, and more Christmas songs before an enthusiastic audience. Bob Young (tuba) welcomed them before the program began. The tables had now turned: the kids were coming to see their parents on stage, taking photos, and helping spread the word.

### **1997: Growth and Developments**

This year brought growth and new developments on many fronts.

In January, a second "beginning" band met before the Band's rehearsal. They soon played

their first "gig" in March at the Senior Softball League's dinner meeting. However, they learned to play their instruments so quickly that they were able to join the "main" band within a few months.

In February, Bob Young started to edit and publish a 2-page monthly newsletter, the "*Prime Time Band Bugle*." It was chock full of information about Band members, the Band's activities, coming events, and handy hints, such as this one by Van:

*"Before you play, you should take 3-5 minutes to warm up by playing scales: easy long notes first, followed by 10 pushups and five deep breaths while hopping on your left foot. (Just kidding, but do warm ups always.)"*

In another Bugle issue, Margaret Zurbuchen (flute) wrote "Life in Prime Time." In part, it read: "*Sitting with my rented flute/ I wondered, could I coax a toot/ From this silver wand with its gleaming keys,/ Could I get even a tiny wheeze?/ When first I blew and BLEW, I found/ It wouldn't even make a sound,/ And, just as I was turning blue,/ Some rather 'fluty' notes came through...*" (She soon mastered the instrument.)

A Social Committee of seven was formed, arranging for two potlucks and an ice cream social after a rehearsal and a lunch at the beach after a performance. In July, rehearsal concluded early and Lorraine Vander Ark and her helpers had Marie Callender pies, coffee, and iced tea for the group. Dick (trumpet) and LeMay Curtis had videotaped the Summer concert and it was played at that time to everyone's enjoyment. A Potluck was held before rehearsal in August at Tucker's Grove Park.



The New Horizons Bands Institute holds 5-day long band camps during the year, hosted by local New Horizons Bands. The first one that Prime Time Band members attended was at Snowmass in June, 1996. In February of 1997, 18 members attended the Camp at Palm Springs. Ernie Pratt summed up his experience (and that of the others): "*The thrill of playing with such a*



*diverse group was a real plus. Our sight reading improved and my fingering improved also.*” In September, one member attended the Band Camp at Chautauqua, New York in the fall.



Prime Time Band members at the Palm Springs New Horizon Band Camp

Five members, June Denny (horn), Don Bennett, Sam Kimbel, Duane Dunker (trumpet), and Bob Young, started a Brass Quintet and played Christmas carols five times in December

The Band continued its two yearly formal concerts, with about 400 in the audience at the Summer event, where 71 Band members played a “Pops” program. The introduction was given by Silvio Di Loreto (clarinet) then the group played 12 pieces, including *Battle Hymn of the Republic*, *Birth of the Blues*, *America*, *Just a Closer Walk With Thee*, *Tijuana Taxi*, and some marches.

Over 500 family members and friends enjoyed the Winter Concert. Sherry Peterson (horn) gave the welcome. They played some classical pieces, a ballad, and the *Prime Time Band March* with Dick Curtis the vocal soloist. Assistant Conductor Jim Mooy led the band in *A Salute to Glenn Miller*.

The concerts were held on Tuesday evenings at La Colina Junior High School. The tradition of serving cookies (50 dozen) and lemonade afterwards was now well established. So, Band members released their pre-concert “butterflies” in their kitchens. The Band recorded the concerts for the first time, putting the music on cassette tapes and making them available to Band members to purchase. Band members’ spouses, children, grandchildren, and friends were recruited to assist at concerts ushering, handing out programs, serving lemonade and cookies, etc.

A Band Director’s Advisory Committee of five members was formed in March to assist and

advise Van in communicating and coordinating the activities the group, Members were Carol Anderson, Don Bennett, June Denney, Jerry Griffith, and Bob Young.

Lee Overbay (trumpet) suggested to the Advisory Board the Band should recognize Van Vander Ark, Jim Mooy and Olga Weddle (Van’s assistants), and Lorraine Vander Ark (Band Manager) for their contributions to the organization. The Committee collected over \$200 from members to purchase the framed certificates, which were presented at the December 16<sup>th</sup> rehearsal.

### 1998: Expanding Horizons

In 1998, the Advisory Board decided a more formal structure was needed and began work on becoming a non-profit organization. They also chose to shorten the name from the “Prime Time Fifty Plus Dream Band” to the “Prime Time Band.” The average age of members was 65. The group’s finances had improved, with a balance in their account of \$1,314.

The Band played for the first of the Santa Barbara Foundation-sponsored “Concerts in the Park,” starting the series off at Chase Palm Park in May. They played in July at Bohnett Park and August at Chase Palm Park.



Van conducts the Band at Bohnett Park

They received a donation from the Foundation for participating in this series and it was used to purchase new music stands and percussion instruments.

The group also played for schools, retirement communities, and senior groups and at Stow House. The Brass Quintet appeared five times, including Memorial Day at Samarkand and three Christmas venues.

The Band was receiving many inquiries from people who wished to join and learn to play an instrument. To meet the demand, a third “beginning” band was started in September, meeting on Monday nights at a local church.

Olga Weddle and Ernie Pratt (oboe) assisted Van with the instruction. In three months, this little band was proficient enough to play five songs before the Winter Concert in December.

The Band's Third Annual Summer Pops Concert was held on June 23 at La Colina Junior High. Toni Straka (percussion) gave the welcome and 63 Band members played to a full house. The Band played the Prime Time Band theme song, featuring Leonard Pacheco as vocal soloist. The program of 15 pieces varied from picturesque (*Shenandoah, America the Beautiful*) to rousing fun (*Strike Up The Band, Ghost Riders in the Sky, and Swing Bolero*).

Ed Piceno (trombone) gave the welcome address for the Winter Concert. Olga Weddle, director of the Beginning Band, conducted the "Beginning Band" of 29 (some from the "main" band) in Christmas carols, a march, and *Ode to Joy*. After their performance, the Prime Time Band played a challenging program, including *The Drunken Sailor*, and *Great Gate of Kiev*. Also on the program was *Water Music* led by guest conductor Irwin Maguire, and *Trilogy* and *An Old English Christmas* led by Assistant PTB Conductor Jim Mooy.



The band members enjoyed guests who visited their rehearsals, including clinics by Fan Shengqu, Chinese jazz saxophonist and composer, and David Khrebiel, horn instructor at the Music Academy. Dr. Roy Ernst, New Horizons Bands Founding Director, visited in April, and he video taped some of the members for a production to be used to recruit new bands.

This was a good time for Van to announce to the Band that they have graduated from Junior High School grade band music – from a beginning primer to challenging work in only three years! By this time they had 68 songs in their folders.

The *Bugle* published "Rehearsal Etiquette" rules, which included: "No visiting when the director is helping sections with their performance, and keep humming, comments, condensation-blowing, noise to a minimum..." Rehears-

als were rarely cancelled, but on February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 30-50 mph winds and a deluge that downed power lines, closed the airport, and halted trains were enough to take a week off.

In June Band members collected donations for a party for Van and Lorraine's return from a vacation trip to Italy and for Jim Mooy's birthday. They had enough money left over from this party to have an ice cream and cookies feast after rehearsal in August.

### 1999: Year of Major Milestones

The year began with an invitation by Roy Ernst for the Brass Quintet to perform as part of his presentation at the National Association of Music Merchants at the Los Angeles Trade Convention. Other Band members were invited to ride the bus to the convention and were able to browse the exhibits before watching the Quintet's performance.

Several milestones were reached in 1999. Articles of Incorporation and an Application for Exempt Status were submitted to the State. Forms were filed for Internal Revenue Service non-profit status. In July, the Advisory Committee became the Board of Directors and a Finance Committee led by Ed Piceno received funding to help defray the costs of incorporation.

In September, the Prime Time Band became a 501(c)(3) corporation. The first Board of Directors were Don Bennett, President; Bob Young, Vice President; Carol Anderson, Secretary; Mary MacDonald (clarinet), Treasurer; and Merna McClenathen (clarinet), Ed Piceno, and Nick Rail Directors at Large. J.B. Vander Ark was appointed Executive Director. Dues will now be collected by the Treasurer. Mary MacDonald developed the Band's web site.

Members entered the Santa Barbara 4<sup>th</sup> of July Parade – on the back of a flatbed tow truck! Very tricky keeping one's balance on folding chairs and trying to read and play music! After one more year on the truck, the group decided riding in a trolley was safer.



The Band continues to perform in the community, playing for senior groups and in parks. The performance at Stow House became an annual event, as did that at the Santa Barbara Women's Club.

A "prank" by the percussion section at the performance for the Raytheon Company's picnic has turned into a tradition. A catchy little Latin tune, *Carmelita*, brought to mind dancers with red roses in their mouths. The pesky percussionists decided to wait until Van was started on the downbeat then slip the plastic flowers between their teeth – it would be too late for him to stop them! Wrong! Sharp reflexes caused Van to stop in mid-downbeat. The Band members just stared at him, wondering "Now what?" Van said, "Turn around and look behind you." Well, there were the four percussionists standing there looking pretty silly with roses hanging out of their mouths. A good laugh was had by all and a tradition of funny hats and accessories was started.



The City of Santa Barbara proclaimed the Prime Time Band as the city's "Honorary Community Band." The mayor Harriet Miller read a letter of Special Recognition at the September 28<sup>th</sup> City Council meeting, acknowledging the contributions of the Prime Time Band to the community. Van accepted the award and about a dozen members were in the audience. In return, Van presented the Mayor with an embossed tambourine, declaring her an honorary member of the Band.

Five music clinics were held for Band members in 1999 at the La Colina Band Room. Through the auspices of Nick Rail, a low brass clinic by Doug Denniston of Laguna Blanca started the series, followed by a second low brass clinic by David Finlayson of the Music Academy; flute clinic by Steve Carr, studio musician from the San Fernando Valley; trumpet clinic by Scott Wright, teacher and free-lance player; and clarinet clinic by Steve Carr.

Over 80 members and guests attended the potluck dinner at Tucker's Grove on July 27<sup>th</sup>

before rehearsal. In September, 70 people enjoyed food and camaraderie.

The first Ensemble Night was held at La Colina Junior High in March. It featured the Clarinet Choir, Baritone Quartet, Clinic Quintet, Brass Quintet, Saxophone Sextet, and Dixieland Band.

The "Beginning" Band meeting on Monday nights outgrew the facilities at the church and moved its rehearsals to La Colina. Director Weddle invites all Tuesday Band members to join their rehearsals to help fill out the sound and mentor their players. Its first "gig" was at the Santa Barbara Recreational Center in a benefit for Garden Court Senior Housing.

Summer "Pops" Concert was held at 7:30 p.m. in the auditorium at La Colina Junior High School. A *Bugle* article noted a capacity crowd enjoyed the *Pink Panther*, *Light Cavalry*, and *Irish Interlude*. *Themes Like Old Times* was also a hit. The all-female drum line teased the audience by clenching long-stemmed roses between their teeth during *Carmelita* and wearing black mantillas for *Punta Larga*. The Concert was recorded and released on Compact Disc for the first time. A dedicated group of Band members met before a rehearsal to put the covers on the cases and the CDs inside. The CDs are available for purchase.

Santa Barbara City officials included the Band in the celebration of the opening of the newly refurbished AMTRAK station on December 18<sup>th</sup>. The Band received a \$200 honorium for its participation.



The Winter Concert was held on December 7<sup>th</sup> and the welcome was given by Don Bennett. The Beginning Band's 36 members, with Olga Weddle conducting, opened with five songs, including *Bourbon Street Barbecue* and *Westminster March*. The Prime Time Band's 81 members then opened with Handel's *Prelude & Fughetta*. They also played marches and the audience sang along with Christmas songs.



By December 1999, there were 88 members in the Prime Time Band and 25 in the Beginning Band.

Judy Cousineau (clarinet) kept a beautiful memory book with programs, photos, and other memorabilia of the first five years. The photos in this article are from her book.

To end the year, the Band was part of the City of Santa Barbara's First Night on December 31<sup>st</sup>. The 90-minute program was played by 72 Band members on the steps of the Main Post Office.

This was the night of the infamous Y2K anxiety. Would computers refuse to recognize the year 2000? Would they revert back to 1900? Would power grids and other infrastructure fail?

Emergency services personnel gathered at a command post to monitor the results of the time change around the world. To their relief, country after country successfully celebrated the New Year of 2000 with no computer disasters.



### And Our Band Played On!

Everyone watched the clock with unease  
And our Band played on.

From around the world, anxieties soon whirled  
And our Band played on.

But the angst was so profound you could hear  
not a sound;  
Everyone kept eyes on the dials.

The hour came and went; no glitch in the event.  
And our Band played on!

### The Prime Time Fifty Plus Dream Band\*

We are the Prime Time Fifty Plus Dream Band  
We are superb & versatile  
We are the Prime Time Fifty Plus Dream Band  
There is no one to match our style.

Please come and join our Fifty Plus Dream Band  
Become a part of all our fame  
Once you have shared the magic of music  
Your life will never be the same.

(First Bridge)

Hear the shouting,  
Hear the cheering,  
Thousands by the score.  
We are famous for our music  
Who could ask for more.

We are the Prime Time Fifty Plus Dream Band,  
We are the envy of our peers.  
We are the Prime Time Fifty Plus Dream Band,

We will be known for years and years.  
(16 measures instrumental,  
voices on second bridge)

(Second Bridge)

Hear the cheering,  
Hear the shouting,  
Thousands scream encore.  
Hey! Maestro do you hear them  
Begging us for more....

We are the Prime Time Fifty Plus Dream Band  
We are the envy of our peers  
We are the Prime Time Fifty Plus Dream Band  
We will be known for years and years.

\*Words and music by Leonard C. Pacheco,  
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<sup>2</sup> Genesis of New Horizons Bands. Skip Maggiora, owner of Skip's Music in Sacramento, developed a concept of Weekend Warriors in the 1980s to encourage former garage band players to come back to playing music. His target group were those who had played in high school and/or college. The group gave weekend concerts, enabling the musicians to share their skills with each other and the public. The program brought Skip's Music both recognition and business.

The success of the Weekend Warriors came to the attention of the National Association for Music Merchants (NAMM) and they asked Skip if they could present his idea to their membership. Skip agreed and NAMM recommended the Weekend Warriors idea to dealers. Music stores across the United States soon had successful programs.

NAMM realized there was still an untapped market with a potential to recruit former musicians to play again. They contacted Dr. Roy Ernst of the Eastman School of Music in Buffalo, New York. He agreed to develop a model program, emphasizing entry and re-entry points to music for older adults. Dr. Ernst conducted the first group with Eastman graduate students assisting. The experiment was such a success, Dr. Ernst became founding director of the New Horizons Music Project, funded by NAMM and the National Association of Band Instrument Manufacturers.