

August 16, 2016

Dear new member and parents,

MONDAY is the big night!!

It is time to get instruments in the kids' hands. There are a lot of options out there, so I wanted to give you the information you need to begin the process.

We're currently in the process of letting kids try the instruments they're interested in. We'll have everyone taken care of by Friday. If you'd rather be present at the testing, please contact us so we can make arrangements for you Thursday or Friday evening.

Obviously, every student must have their own instrument. Folks who play Tuba or Baritone will use a school-owned instrument, because the cost of these instruments is so high. Everyone else will need to make arrangements to get an instrument now.

The first decision to be made is whether to buy or rent an instrument. It doesn't matter to us, and there are pros and cons to each.

If you already own the instrument your child is going to play, please make it a point to bring it by the band room sometime so we can check it out. You really don't want your child to start out behind the class because the instrument wasn't working properly. We'll be happy to examine it and let you know how it works.

### **RENTING**

We have asked AMRO Music Stores, Inc., to be present at our meeting on August 22. They offer an excellent rent-to-own plan. Essentially, you make a down payment that night (last year it was \$60), and then make monthly payments afterwards. These payments apply towards the purchase of the instrument, so you will own it at the end of the rental period.

When renting an instrument, the music store provides an excellent insurance program for an additional \$6 (roughly) a month. It's called "Maintenance and Replacement" (or M&R), and is well worth the cost. In the event an instrument is stolen or damaged, AMRO will replace the instrument. Time and time again, we've seen this program save families a great deal of stress and money.

Another positive aspect of renting is that in the event your child leaves the band for whatever reason, you may simply turn the instrument in to the band directors, and your obligation to AMRO ends, along with your payments. Please know, however, that there is a one-semester minimum rental. This is because all kids go through a period when the "new" has worn off and the work gets a little repetitive. We call it "The Slump." Easily 95-99% of kids get through it just fine, and are glad they kept going. After the first few months, they progress faster and faster, and their enjoyment is greater and greater.

We ask AMRO to provide re-conditioned instruments for our beginners. These are horns that were used as rentals for a short time, but returned. We recommend them because they have been thoroughly inspected, cleaned, and sterilized, and are literally as good as new. The benefit is that they are significantly less expensive than brand-new horns. Of course, AMRO will happily provide brand-new instruments if you choose.

## **PURCHASING**

Some families prefer not to rent their instruments and save the financing charges. This is totally acceptable. There are some great deals out there. Many pawn shops and online auctions have really great instruments for a lot less money than a music store. Unfortunately, there are a lot of unacceptable instruments out there as well. In fact, there are some brands we refer to as “instrument-shaped objects.” These are really cheap instruments that many parents mistakenly get, thinking they’ve saved a lot of money.

These “ISO’s” are not made according to industry standards. This means that the instruments do not work well, damage easily, and have non-standard parts. This means that instrument repair technicians can’t fix them, and their sound doesn’t match that of the other students, affecting both the kids and the band. Parent think they’ve gotten a good deal with these because of the low cost, but by the time they’ve gone through the nightmare of having to replace them, they wish they had avoided them.

*We have provided a list of good instrument brands later in this letter, as well as the brands to steer clear of. Please refer to this list if you choose to get an instrument on your own. We do not allow the substandard instruments in our program.*

If you choose to shop for an instrument, make sure you’re getting the correct instrument for what your child is supposed to have. If you find one at a pawn shop, they will usually allow you to borrow it long enough to bring it to us and let us check it out for you. You’ll be paying for the instrument in one payment, and we don’t want you to get stuck with a problem instrument.

If you find one online, before bidding or buying, either print out all of the information about it and let us see it, or forward the web-page to us. Ebay, for example, has a link on their pages where you can “email to a friend.” Simply click on the link and send us the page. Our email addresses are at the top of the band website - [www.pocahontasband.org](http://www.pocahontasband.org) - and at the end of this letter. We’ll dig around and let you know if it’s a good deal or not and get back to you.

There are some band instrument stores in Little Rock and Cape Girardeau. They will sell quality instruments, but you’ll need to go there to check them out. The music stores in Jonesboro sometimes have a good used instrument for a good price, but they’re not licensed retailers for the major brands, so they won’t have new instruments, and won’t be able to offer service. (We had a problem with one Jonesboro store who convinced a family they were getting a name brand horn. Turns out it was an ISO in a name brand case. The store was reluctant to refund their money, and didn’t until we stepped in. Luckily, it turned out well and the family was just inconvenienced.

There are a lot of instruments floating around Pocahontas from former band members. If you're getting one of these, please bring it by so we can check it out for you and make sure it's ready to go. Most will be in good shape, but some won't, and the owners may not know it. There is a mite in our area, for example, that feeds on the glue used to hold pads on to instruments. Re-padding a horn can be very expensive, so let us check it out before your "good deal" turns in to an expensive proposition.

Starting out with band can certainly be intimidating and confusing. You want the best for your child, but many times aren't sure what the best is, in terms of instruments and their quality. We want you to get the best you can for the best price you can. There are some great deals out there, but there are just as many lemons. It sometimes takes a trained eye to catch potentially expensive flaws.

We recommend the AMRO rental because we trust it. We do a lot of business with them, and they take care of us as a priority customer. The rental program usually works best for most folks, and the M&R program offers a lot of piece of mind for parents of 11 and 12 year olds who are responsible for these instruments. Please know, though, that neither the school nor the directors have any financial interest in the instrument rental. We've used AMRO for over 20 years, and have developed a good working relationship, but you need to do what works best for you and your situation.

#### **OTHER INFORMATION**

**DON'T PANIC** if you need time next week to make a decision. We'll get started with the kids, but as long as you don't take too long, your child won't be behind. You need to make a decision that works for your family.

All students, including students who will be using school horns, will need to purchase a textbook and supplies. All of the needed items are included with the AMRO price. If you get an instrument from a different source, you'll still need the textbook (about \$10), and a cleaning/care kit (about \$15). AMRO also provides a music stand for home practice for their customers. All of these items will be available at the August 22 meeting.

The band owns a few instruments available for rent to families who need financial assistance. It would be a mistake to assume we have one available for your child. Talk to us privately if your family needs assistance.

#### **INFORMATION FOR SPECIFIC INSTRUMENTS:**

Clarinet, Saxophones and Oboes will need to purchase reeds. A reed usually lasts anywhere from a few days to a couple of weeks, unless it's broken. We provide them to our students without charge, thanks to all of the parents who help us out in our football concession stand.

Percussionists need a snare drum and bells kit. If you already have a snare drum (from a drum set, maybe), make sure its stand allows the drum to be raised to the height of your child's waist while standing. Otherwise, you'll need a new stand. You'll need SD-1 snare sticks (about \$9), and if you already have your own, we must approve them. AMRO percussion kits include sticks and mallets as part of the down payment.

We hope this letter has provided you with enough information to assist you in your search. If you choose to rent, sit back and wait for the August 22 meeting. You'll rent the instrument then, so be prepared to make a down payment, which includes the first month's rental and all of the supplies. Most rentals run about \$45 a month after that.

If you need further assistance, please don't hesitate to contact us. We're here to help you through this process and to make the best possible experience for your child. Our office number is 870 892 4573, extension 3050. We're pretty busy this time of year, so leave a message, or better yet, email. We are able to respond quicker with email.

Congratulations on allowing your child to develop their musical talents! We're really looking forward to a great year!!

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**TRUSTWORTHY INSTRUMENT BRANDS:**

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**YAMAHA**

**OLDS**

**GEMEINHARDT**

**SELMER**

**BUFFET**

**NOBLET**

**BUNDY**

**BACH**

**KING**

**JUPITER**

**ACCENT**

**YANIGASAWA**

**GETZEN**

**BUSCHER**

**CONN**

**VITO**

**EMERSON**

**BLESSING**

**LEBLANC**

**HOLTON**

*STEER CLEAR OF THESE BRANDS:*

**HEIMER**

**WINSTON**

**BRASSWIND**

**STUBBIN**

**BESTLER**

**BLUEBIRD**

**WOODWIND**

**CONCERT MARK II**

**KNIGHTON**

**SIMBA**

**PATHFINDER**

**BOSTON**

**JEAN BAPTISTE**

**LA HORN**

**LARK**

**BAND NOW**

**FIRST ACT**

**BORG**

**PARIS**

**BARRINGTON**

*Neither list is necessarily complete - if you find a brand not listed, please contact us!!!*