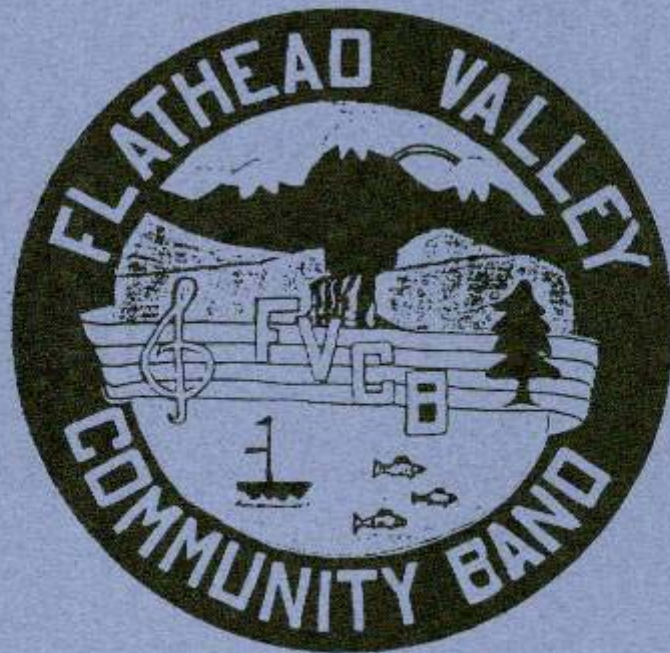


FLATHEAD VALLEY COMMUNITY BAND



HISTORY FROM 1969 TO 1998

Forward

Music, while not my chosen vocation, has always been an important part of my life. I was born and spent most of my lifetime in Owatonna, Minnesota, which, as I was starting in school had a population of about 8,000. My parents decided that I should learn to play the piano, so at an early age I took lessons. My piano teacher was a maiden lady, a product of the Edward McDowell era, and I am sure she had every expectation of making me a concert pianist. She was wrong. When my buddies were outside playing ball, I was in the house doing scales and practicing finger exercises. This went on for five years. I think that my parents decided that since it took over 2 years of practice to be able to play Londonderry Aire well enough to play at a recital, they decided to try me on a clarinet. They obtained a metal mail-order model that was horribly out of tune. If you pulled it out to make it flat in the lower register, it was sharp in the higher register and visa versa. Fortunately, we had a great music teacher by name of Joel Dolvin. He reminds me a great deal of Don Lawrence, in his dedication to his profession. By todays standards, he was very much overworked. He not only had charge of the band, glee club and orchestra in the High School, he also had sectionals for the various instruments, & was also in charge of the music at the four elementary schools. He directed the choir at the Methodist Church, as well as the community male chorus, in the school he produced and directed such operettas, as The Vagabond King, The Desert Song, and Babes in Toyland. In his spare time he was tennis coach. Whatever he taught, I was there, and he had the patience to work with me.

After graduating from high school I attended the University of Minnesota where I played with the concert band. While playing with this band we had an opportunity to play Tchaikovsky 1812 Overture with the Minneapolis Symphony in the Northrop Auditorium at the University. I don't know the exact number of musicians on the stage, but know there were more than 150. When the "cannons" went off, I can still remember the chills that went up and down my spine.

I first heard the Flathead Valley Community Band at Sliter Park in Bigfork at a fall concert there. I was so impressed that I asked Don Lawrence if there was any chance that I could play with them. He told me to call him in January, when they would start rehearsing for the next year. I started playing with the band in January 1992. The thing that impressed me was the number of talented musicians in that band. Not all were music majors in school, some just played because they loved to play, -not for money, but for their own enjoyment and to provide enjoyment to others. The diversity of the background of the players also

impressed me. There are persons with doctorate degrees in other disciplines playing with high school students, and some of the latter are better musicians than the former. To top that, too, was the genuine camaraderie among the players. They had one common objective, they loved music and wanted to play for others as a unit. What a wonderful opportunity for young people to be able to work with and make music with some of us old fahts, without the regimentation necessary in the schools.

One day last summer as I was visiting with Don Snow as we were waiting to play in the Flathead Valley Community Band, I mentioned this experience with the Minneapolis Symphony. He then told me an experience with the 1812 Overture while at Eastman School of Music. He told about one day at rehearsal, after the "cannons" went off, someone suggested that this would be an appropriate time to throw a dead duck on the stage. Well, at the concert, unbeknown to their Director, someone was in the cat-walk over the stage with a pillow. When the "cannon" went off, the pillow was ripped apart and feathers floated down over the orchestra, director and all on the stage. I don't think they ever caught the perpetrator. At least no one publicly acknowledge doing it.

After hearing this tale, I conceived the idea that why not give all the band members an opportunity to share experiences like this, and wouldn't it be great to know more about each of the members of the band. So I talked to Jack Miller, who is president of the band, and asked him if there was a band historian. He said that there was none, and wanted to know if I would want to pursue it further. I told him I would, with the approval of the band board of directors. They gave me their approval, and this is the culmination of that approval.

I feel very humble in being permitted to play with this marvelous band, and while there are a lot of its members who play better than I ever hope to play, I am most appreciative of having the opportunity to play with the band, and feel that this is a small contribution that I can make towards that end.

I want to dedicate this history of the band to its two prime movers, the Lawrence Brothers, Paul and Don, without whom I feel sure that the band would not have existed this long.

David M. Leach

The Lawrence Brothers
(With the Kalispell City Band - circa 1940)



Don

Paul

The Lawrence Brothers

(With the Flathead Valley Community Band - July 1988)

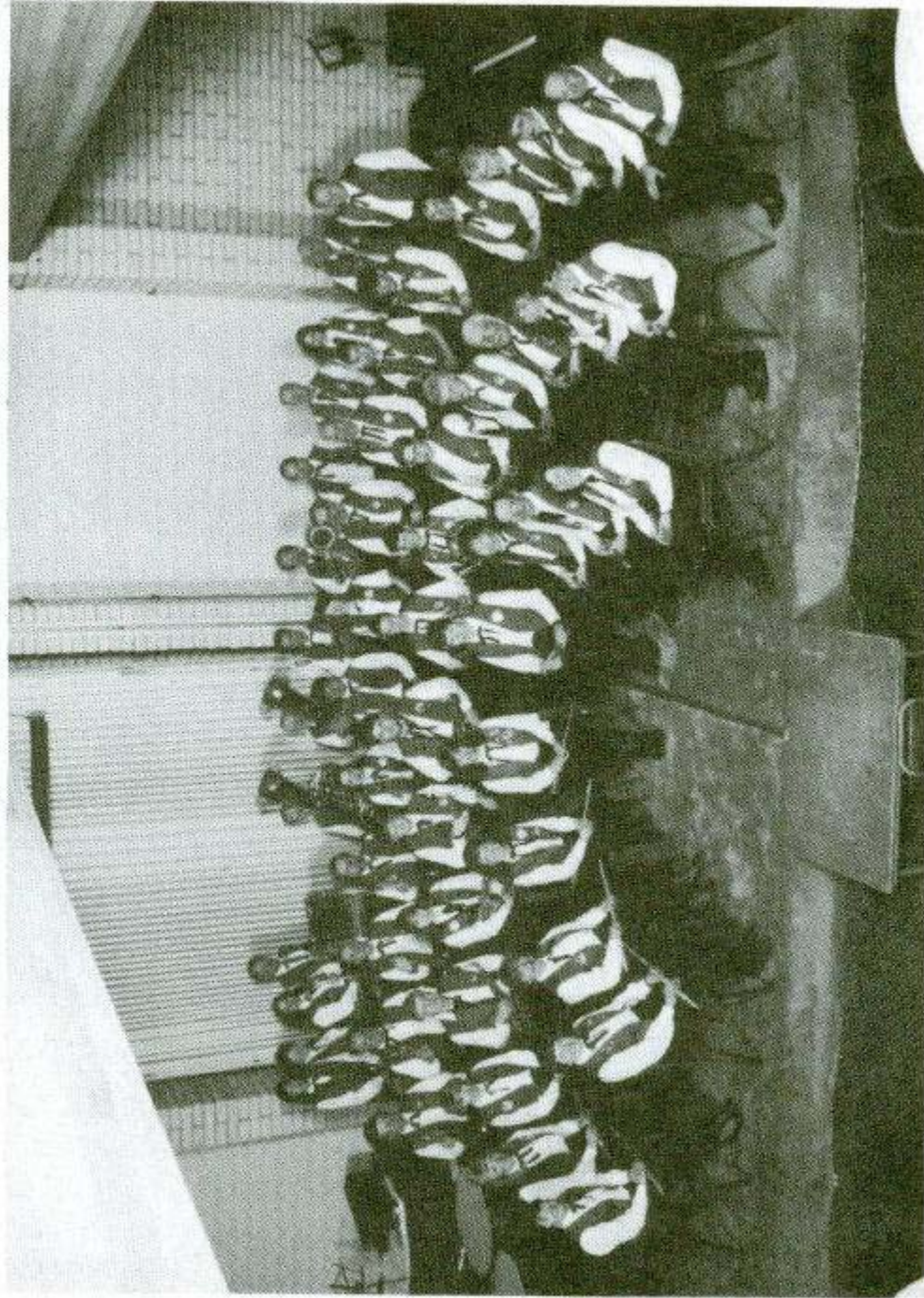


Don

Paul

Flathead Valley Community Band

(Spring Concert at Outlaw Inn, Kalispell, Montana - 1996)



Prior to 1969 the City of Kalispell funded a city band for which players received a small remuneration.. The band played primarily at parades and for the Northwest Montana Fair. The City Council later decided to discontinue the band. There obviously was a desire on the part of some of the members of that band (true music lovers) to continue to play with a community band without pay. A good example of members of the band so inclined were the Lawrence Brothers, Paul and Don. See the picture of them as they appeared in their City Band uniforms complete with Sam Browne belts, - Don with a baritone and Paul with a saxophone.

The seed that ultimately blossomed into what is now the Flathead Valley Community Band was planted in 1969 by Dr. Larry Blake, president of the Flathead Valley Community College (who played baritone in his own right), and Richard Schlatter, Flathead High School Band Director, who had played trumpet with the U.S. Air Force Band. While at the Air Force Mr. Schlatter had a MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) as an expert at the trumpet, the baritone, the French horn and the tuba.. He and Dr. Blake were good friends and Dr. Blake wanted to form a Pep Band for the college. Dick Schlatter was selected and he accepted the job. The college contracted with him to form and direct a band paying him \$7.00 an hour for 20 hours (\$140) per quarter.

In June 1969 an ad was placed in the local paper for musicians to play in a community band. The response was good with a lot of talent in the valley being available. This band made its debut that summer at the Northwest Montana Fair in Kalispell. Later a musical score with lyrics of the "official" Flathead Valley Community College School song was composed by Barb Harpster, Marlene Zahler, and Darla Walton, with the cooperation



of the cheer leaders and music instructor, Dick Schlatter set to the tune of "Hail Purdue". It was especially for the "Mountaineers".

Perhaps the need for the band was precipitated by the prowess of the Flathead Valley Community College basketball team, called the Mountaineers. They had already made their mark and were top performers in the Northwest U.S.A.. A tournament was held in November 1969 in the Kalispell High School gym with over 1,000 persons in attendance. The Mountaineers defeated a community college team from Baker, Oregon, by scoring 153 points, the highest number of points ever scored in that gym. Later they played a visiting team from the University of Bratislavia, Czechoslovakia that had just defeated the University of Montana team the day before. The Mountaineers won by a score of 82 to 73.

In January of 1970 this band prepared for its first concert to be held on January 27th. Most of the players were not students at the college but from the community.

In 1971 the Fair Board paid band members each \$3.50 per performance. Following are names of members of the band who played at the fair, to total cost of which came to \$657, although not all these persons played at each of the performances:

Carol Eliason, Torg Sorenson, Cora Gray, Lyndal Koller, Corliss Nikolaisen, Janell Williams, Jim, Hilseth, Larra Thompson, Patti Potuzak, Marla Manning, Barbara Moen, Lois Pile, Gary Moen, Faye Covey, Don Newman, Paul Lykins, Judi Wagnild, Larry Blake, Don Lawrence, Dave Klehm, Donna Wendt, Larry Ousland, John Austad, Rod Schmidt, Mark Colbick, Randy Schumacher, Paul Lawrence, Ted Mickel, Sr., Ted Mickel, Jr., Darwyn Struck, Roberta Quick, John Sorenson, Ron Lyford, Rob Holston, Steve McClaren, Les Foy, Ken Kirkpatrick, Don Sabol, Laura Brown, Bill Oursland, Frank Sullivan, Geo. Clarkeson; John Fredenberg, Barry Donahue, and Craig Happ.

Like all good things, along with the loss of the support for the basketball team there was a hiatus of support for the band. Mr. Schlatter was involved in many other activities at the high school and there were times when band members failed to show up for practice, so he asked Don Lawrence, then band director in Columbia Falls High School, if he would be willing to take over. Don agreed to do so, and continued to direct the band over a

period 25 years. I believe that Don Lawrence was also paid by the college for a short period of time, but whatever small payments that were made, not only to Don Lawrence, but to Dick Schlatter, were reinvested in the band, - for music and other needs of the band. Neither was in it for the money, and they both loved music,— all kinds of music.

Some of the memorable occasions occurred in the 1980's and 90's, some very pleasant and at least one a total fiasco.

The band had been invited by the Montana Friendship Force to play in Billings. This involved three days, including travel and lodging, most of which was at the individual player's own expense. There were about 1,000 persons in attendance, most of whom were in a state of intemperance towards the proffered refreshments, rather than the finer things in life, such as that to be offered by the band. As a consequence, rather than waste time on an unappreciative audience, the band played a few marches very loudly and went home.

At another time Vice President Bush was at the Outlaw Inn in Kalispell, before the band could perform, each member of the band was thoroughly frisked by federal agents. At a later date the band played at a "political" rally for for President Bush at the Airport in Kalispell.

During the Gulf War, in the fall of 1990, the band played at the Army Reserve Center for a troop movement in Missoula. It has been reported that they played through the entire march book.

In the early 1980's exchange concerts were had with the Libby Community Band. In later years, the band was often asked to play at the Nordic Fest in Libby, which always seemed to be a fantastic undertaking for a community the size of Libby. The band played on a flat-bed truck rather than march in the parade. and later the band as well as other groups from within the band, along with the Don Lawrence Orchestra played in concert. The band also played at Libby for the "Logger Days".

Another frequent occurrence included the Coal Miner Days at Sparwood, British Columbia, Canada. This consisted of a parade and lots of other activities, including Hose Hockey. At one of these occasions, members of the band won the International Hose Hockey championship. This involved "firemen" in the band.

During the years of 1993 through 1996 the Flathead Valley Community Band had an exchange with the Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada, Community Band. The band played there two years and the Lethbridge band reciprocated by playing in Kalispell for two years. At one of these concerts at Lethbridge, Don Lawrence wrote an arrangement for the band entitled, "Chainsaw Polka" It had its premier in Lethbridge and watching Judy Berardi wearing a hard-hat soloing on the chain saw, really caught the attention of the audience.

Some of the annual events occurring during the 1990's are: Heritage Days Parade and Concert in Columbia Falls; NordicFest in Libby including a Parade and Concert; Bigfork Fourth of July Parade and concert later in the fall at Sliter Park; North American Indian Gathering in Browning Parade and PowWow; concerts at Glacier Park, - McDonald Lodge, Apgar Amphitheater, East Glacier Lodge and Many Glacier Lodge; Northwest Montana Fair at the Races and Rodeos preceded by a parade; various Nursing Home and Care Units; Concerts at Big Mountain at Whitefish and Eureka.

The band has never charged dues of its members, nor are the players paid for playing with exception several years ago when those playing at the Fair were paid a small amount. In recent years, any monies given the band by any of its sponsors is retained for purchasing needed musical supplies, transportation and other expenses incurred by the band.

There are several groups made up from members of the band, such as the Bavarian Echoes, the BrassWerks, Big Horn Trio, Bottom Line, and Hungry Five Combo. Of the many groups from within the band, the number one group was probably the Bavarian Echoes. In 1970 Don Lawrence had been in Germany with his Columbia Falls band. In 1977 Don and Barbara his wife, and Paul Lawrence and his wife, Barbara, went to Munich for the October Fest. Paul had been able to get some German band and polka music and they thought that if the Octoberfest was successful there, why not try it here. It started out with a small group and gradually became quite popular. Expectations of the Echoes becoming a very popular group with lots of gigs didn't work out as expected and hoped for. Nevertheless, the Octoberfest has become an annual event and

the only "fund raiser" held for the benefit of the Flathead Valley Community Band. The Bavarian Echoes has traditionally sponsored the only fund raiser for the band at what is called the "October Fest" The admission charged entitled the guests to a fine German- style menu, and some good old Polka music. The place is decorated with many German memorabilia. Thanks be to the Lawrences.

Don Lawrence had previously served in Germany while in the U.S. Air Force, and became acquainted with many of the local musicians. This resulted in several trips to Germany by not only Don, but with his brother, Paul. Paul had been able to acquire quite a library of German band and polka music for the Echoes. Paul also directed the Echoes at its gigs. However, the success of the Flathead Valley Community Band as it exists today, is due to a large extent to the Lawrence Brothers, - with Paul Lawrence in the background and Don Lawrence in the foreground. To them this history is dedicated. Both are talented musicians, and not only play many instruments, but both compose and arrange music for both the FVCB and for the Echoes.

On February 14, 1984 the Flathead Valley Community Band, Inc. was incorporated with the Secretary of State of Montana pursuant to the Montana Nonprofit Corporation Act. On November 18, 1988 the Articles of Incorporation were amended in order to secure a tax exempt statute with the Internal Revenue Service. On the February 27, 1989 the Internal Revenue Service granted the band a tax exempt status.

In 1988 arrangements were made for the Flathead Valley Community Band to go to Germany in concert. They stayed with German families with whom Don and Paul had become acquainted. In 1990 The FVCB reciprocated by having the German Band personnel here in the Flathead Valley

Don had tried over the years to create more interest in the band concerts in the community by innovative methods, such as by composing music for the band, by permitting individual groups from within the band to perform during the intermission, and by finding and selecting different types of music for each occasion. The Official March adopted by the U.S. Congress, Sousa's "Stars and Stripes Forever", had long been the closing number at the concerts, even before being adopted as the U.S. Official March.

Most of the concerts were free, although sponsors would give something towards the concert to cover expenses. Neither the players, nor director were compensated and this is exemplified by their "love of music".