

# Get to know your *Symphony*

Fall 2010

## **Dave Kliss:** *The Substitute who Never Left*

**I**t was September 2006 and Kettle Moraine Symphony Director Bud Asch needed a principal trombonist.

Dave Kliss had subbed off and on with the orchestra from since 1982 as he had played with two other groups, the Lakeshore Symphonic Band and the Washington Brass Quintet.

He left the Lakeshore Symphonic Band in spring. Months later, Asch showed up at the door of Kliss' West Bend home with the principal trombone folder. He asked him to fill the position for the first part of the season.

"I never said no to Bud," Kliss said. "He's one of those rare people you meet and you have such high admiration and respect for."

Turns out Kliss became more than a sub.

"I enjoyed it so much that I stayed on and became a regular member," he said.

The principal trombonist is now under a new director, Paul Thorgaard, whom he said already has developed a good rapport with the orchestra.

"I really like him. The orchestra is in good hands," Kliss said.

For Kliss, music is more than a hobby; it's his career. He has taught music for 37 years, the last 31 as Germantown's Kennedy Middle School band director.



While music is in his heart, it's not in his blood. Kliss' parents listened to music but didn't play. He remembers perking up when as a child the school came through showing the band instruments.

"I just remember I thought it was very interesting," he said.

His sister played clarinet and Kliss wanted trumpet, but the shape of his lips and mouth didn't match. He was genetically made for euphonium.

That turned out just fine.

"I fell in love with it," Kliss said.

He enjoyed the sweet notes of his labor. The more he worked at it, the better he got.

“That was probably the first time in my life ... I was able to succeed at something at the level I wanted to.”

Playing in a band and having that shared experience with others is a blast.

“It’s absolutely amazing. You’ll hear somebody play a few notes and somebody else play a few notes,” Kliss said. “There’s just this kind of energy in the air when you play. You feel physically involved.”

It’s even better in the KMS.

“In orchestra, with the vibration of the strings, there’s the physical vibration you get,” he said.

Kliss picked up trombone in college but returned to euphonium in the Lakeshore Symphony Band. When he came to the KMS, he switched back to trombone as the orchestra doesn’t have a euphonium.

Kliss said he enjoys both instruments.



When performing in public, he’d rather play trombone but for pure enjoyment in his basement it’s euphonium.

Since 1984, Kliss has played trombone in the Washington Brass Quintet, which performs at weddings and in churches. Kliss said the group doesn’t have a director, making the five players independent and interdependent, “so it’s challenging and rewarding at the same time.”

Kliss’ favorite quintet music is ragtime and baroque. In the KMS, he likes Russian composers who “write great, strong parts for trombone. When you count 180 measures rest and play three notes it’s not as fun.”

When he’s just listening, Kliss will put on bluegrass or jazz, “especially if it features trombone.”

As a teacher, Kliss naturally tries to stay current with the music his students like “that I can’t say I like.”

He hopes some of those students perhaps join the KMS someday, since many KMS members have been playing for a long time.

“I do feel it’s a wonderful opportunity for a performer to have a community orchestra available,” he said.

Kliss’ wife, Mary Reilly-Kliss, who retired from teaching language arts in Kewaskum five years ago, doesn’t play music but likes to listen to bluegrass. Their two daughters both came through the West Bend High Schools band program, and one still plays piano for enjoyment.

Not learning piano is one of Kliss’ few regrets. He can play enough for his job, but he said “I haven’t made anybody hear me play.”

But he has an ivory improvement plan in the works to rectify that.

“It’s one of my retirement goals,” he said.