

Didsbury High's band concert turns into special tribute for retiring band teacher Kirk Wassmer

Didsbury High School's Christmas concert was extra special in December. Kirk Wassmer, the band director, had earlier announced he will retire at the end of the 2023-24 school year after 23 years of teaching at the school. So... the students and staff decided to use the occasion of the concert to pay tribute to Wassmer.

"The concert was an emotional event with many people from Kirk's past and present taking the microphone to talk about their experiences with Kirk and the effect he has had on their lives. Past students described how he was the source of inspiration for them going into a music and/or teaching career," said Scott MacDonald, Principal, Didsbury High School.

MacDonald said, "The bands played with their expected level of professionalism and excellence and the whole night highlighted the effect Mr. Wassmer has had on not only the band program but on Didsbury High School itself and the greater community.



"DHS and Didsbury are on the map for many people in Alberta and across Canada primarily due to the work Kirk has done with our students to create one of the strongest music programs in the country," said MacDonald.

Chelsea Budd is a former student and current co-worker at Didsbury High School, as the school's Library Technician. She said, *"The tribute was heartfelt and humourous, which is apt for Kirk. The stories that were shared captured his patience, dedication and comedic approach perfectly."*

Budd added that while Wassmer has many accomplishments and is highly respected, *"at the end of the day, the love and care that he has for his students is by far his greatest legacy. Students see him not just their teacher, but also as their teammate and partner in the music making process. Students are genuinely at ease around him, and that strong relational base gives them the confidence to meet his high expectations."*



“Mr. Wassmer’s classes quickly became one of my favorite places to be,” said Kailey Melin, a former student and current teacher at River Valley School in Sundre. “His classes were so much fun I decided to go to university to become just like Mr. W - a band teacher. Mr. Wassmer has a kindness, patience and passion that is beyond compare. He created an environment where students were free to be themselves and create a lifelong love of music.”

Another former student, Alex Hutcheon, also became a music teacher in large part because of Wassmer’s impact. *“Kirk helped me get into the music education program in Lethbridge by offering private lessons after school as well as teaching me basic music theory; also outside the allotted school hours,”* said Hutcheon, who now teaches at Cremona School.

“The tribute to Kirk was amazing. It was great to see so many students from different eras speak about the impact that Kirk has had on their lives. Kirk is truly a legend. He means so much to the school and the entire community, and has changed many lives for the better,” said Hutcheon.

“The evening was overwhelming, honestly,” said Kirk Wassmer. *“You like to hope that what you do makes a difference, but to hear it from students and families, who continue to mean a lot of mean even after they’ve left Didsbury High, it’s incredibly special.”*

Wassmer said, *“I am very proud that our band room at Didsbury High is a happy place for so many of our students, and a ‘team’ that they can be a part of during their high school years.”*

