

Amherst Town Band marks a quarter-century of music

By DEAN SHALHOUP

Staff Writer

AMHERST – They've traveled across the "big pond" more than once to share their traditional small-town America brand of entertainment, but it's safe to say the Amherst Town Band's favorite venue is under the trees on their own Village Green.

And that's just where the 40 or so musicians will be Tuesday for a special concert highlighting their 25th anniversary season together as an iconic town band that's proud to call Amherst home.

At 33, Brian Moore has been connected with the band for more than half its existence, coming on board as a Souhegan High junior at the urging of then-school music director Jean Butler,

who also helped found the band in 1986.

Now a music teacher himself, Moore has written a new piece that the band will debut at Tuesday's concert. Called "Celebrate Heritage," the piece has been central to the band's recent rehearsal sessions as it prepares for Tuesday.

"I remember first seeing the Town Band play in Milford as a kid, and thinking how cool it would be to play in a band like that," Moore said at a rehearsal at Souhegan this week. Years later, expressing that interest to Butler, he got the invitation he'd looked forward to.

"She knew I was looking for some community service hours so she said, 'c'mon, join the Town Band,'" Moore said. Sitting in, he quickly saw a

few other familiar faces as well – current conductor Pat McMullen, who played French horn at the time, was also Souhegan's choral director.

Trumpet player Richard Ridolfo, who moved to town from Albany, N.Y. in 1984, said he picked up the Milford Cabinet one day and spotted a blurb about a new town band forming and seeking members.

A lifelong musician who played for American Legion bands back home, Ridolfo trotted out his horn and went to his first rehearsal. He's since watched the band evolve into an accomplished ensemble.

"We got bigger, and quite a bit better," Ridolfo said this week. "When we started, a lot of members hadn't played in awhile. We needed to get our form back."

Ridolfo, at 67 the band's only charter member, later moved to Hampton Falls, but had no intention of letting a few miles come between him and the band. "It's not a big imposition on (my) time," he said. "We all are here because we love to play music."

Butler and her husband Irv, who retired in 2002, grew the band out of a small contingent of about a dozen musicians they assembled for a local PTA show in 1986.

Looking for a place to rehearse, the Butlers went to then-town recreation director Pete Hous-



Courtesy photo

Joe McMullen plays the euphonium, a baritone horn that's a distant relative of the tuba, in a recent Amherst Town Band concert.

ton, who not only found them space, he served as their announcer as well.

Meanwhile, the couple ran the entire show, organizing rehearsals, the annual schedules and publicity.

The Butlers were called back as guests for the band's 20th anniversary show in 2006. Jean Butler said at the time they felt honored by the invitation, and expressed how excited and gratified she and her husband were to see how the band had flourished.

Today, the band, a non-profit organization, puts

on about a dozen free concerts each season, which runs from May to September. It also comes out for the annual December tree-lighting festival.

Members like to mix things up, trying new and different pieces among their traditional renditions of Broadway tunes, marches, jazz, classical and pop.

Amherst's large, two-day July Fourth celebration actually grew out of a Town Band concert some years ago. Now, it plays before the traditional July 3 fireworks and again the next day in the town's

Fourth of July parade.

Joe McMullen, Pat's husband and the band's sole euphonium player, said a love of music is members' greatest common denominator. "We're mostly amateurs, with a few pros," he said. "Bottom line is we just like to play," he said, adding that the band likes to do occasional fundraisers and benefits for local causes.

"It's all about the joy of playing."

Dean Shalhoup can be reached at 673-3100, ext. 31, or dshalhoup@nashuatelegraph.com.

IF YOU GO:

The Amherst Town Band, celebrating its 25th anniversary season this year, is marking the milestone at a special concert next week.

WHEN: Tuesday, July 19, 7 p.m.

WHERE: Village Green

HOW MUCH: Free.

FOR MORE: Go to www.amhersttownband.org

The band's remaining schedule for the 2011 season follows. All start at 7 p.m. unless otherwise noted.

Sunday, July 17 – Bandstand, York Beach, Maine

Tuesday, July 19 – 25th anniversary concert, Amherst Village Green

Wednesday, Aug. 17 – Emerson Park, Milford

Tuesday, Aug. 30 – Amherst Village Green

Saturday, Sept. 17 – Hollis Old Home Days parade, 10:30 a.m.