

George “Buddy” Strickland

ATSSB Hall of Fame Inductee, 2024

“Make me an instrument of the Lord.” This has been George Strickland’s prayer and theme as an educator, administrator, advocate, and facilitator of music education in the great state of Texas. It has been his desire for students to develop a love of music and to develop the necessary skills to use their God-given talents to express that love.

George Vernon Strickland, Jr., (Buddy), was born on January 23, 1951, in Austin, Texas. Named after his father, he is the youngest of three children of Vernon and Earline Strickland. He was oldest sister Verlene’s little “Buddy.” Piano lessons and his musical journey began at age five and the clarinet was added in the sixth grade. It was a “big

deal” as a member of the Lamar Junior High Band with director Vic Williams to premier “March Lamar” by Clifton Williams. At Lanier High School in Austin, Buddy played the bass clarinet, served as drum major for two years, learned to play string bass in the orchestra, and even sang bass in the mixed choir his senior year. Directors included Charlie Jones, band; Edward Gifford, choir; and the late Dr. Jay Dunnahoo, orchestra.

Buddy wanted to “see the world” through the United States Navy but that changed when Howard Payne University in Brownwood offered scholarship opportunities. Director of Bands Greg Berry, private lesson instructor John Farrell, and Department Chair Dr. George Baker set Buddy on the path to music education. The Howard Payne Band provided many fun and memorable opportunities to learn. Some of you in the audience will remember driving to Whitewater, Wisconsin, in the band’s battered van for the very first DCI competition. KOA Campgrounds, peanut butter & jelly sandwiches, driving around the clock up there and back meant learning about the newest trends about to show up in Texas bands. Later, James Mallow, retired from Brady High School, became his first mentor as student teacher supervisor. Howard Payne graduated a number of band directors in the same time frame that were and have continued to be close friends and colleagues: Greg Miller, retired, Iowa Park High School; Chuck Christian, retired, Howard Payne University; Johnny Miller, retired, minister and former band director; Dr. Daryl Trent, retired, Frisco ISD; and Jim Alexander, retired, Mansfield ISD. Thank you, guys, for your friendship.

In 1973 George began his professional teaching career in Robert Lee, Texas, a small West Texas town north of San Angelo. Because a school administrator saw the name “George” on the job application, Buddy became known as George in the professional world, or as he would jokingly say, “I am George to those that respect me!”

The 1973 band director at Bronte High School, the only other school in Clay County, had been teaching for four years; immediately, Louis Thornton became a mentor and reference for George, and he quickly joined the list of life-long director colleagues and friends. For five years George and Louis worked together to improve relations between the archival school districts. One normal Friday night halftime, both school bands performed their shows; then, as a surprise to everyone, the bands joined together on the field to entertain both sidelines. Raised eyebrows



from the spectators soon gave way to rousing applause and cheers for the best bands in the county.

In 1975, a “flag corps” was added to the Steer Band; Robert Lee was one of only eight public schools in Texas with a flag corps that year, and George became one of the “experts” in the field. In 1976 he married the love of his life, Melinda Bynum Strickland, and that same flag corps showed up at their wedding, in uniform, to salute the couple as they left the church. Really though, they were hiding the groomsmen’s shenanigans related to the couple’s car! (Remember those close friends from Howard Payne?) Melinda became his unpaid assistant, chief supporter, and confidante for the band programs.

In 1978, the Stricklands moved to Comanche, a rural peanut farm community northeast of Brownwood and home of the “Injun Band from Peanut Land.” It was also where son Jeremy was born in January 1979. This life-changing addition to the Strickland family created new adjustments to the normal band director experience for sure! Still with no assistant director, George was responsible for all bands, fifth grade through high school, and stage band, by himself. He even sponsored two young ladies in their participation in the TMEA All-District, All-Region, and All-Area choirs because Comanche did not have a choral program.

The move to Henrietta, Texas, in 1984 meant George FINALLY had an assistant, Jon Hodge, followed by Ruth Hyde Nethery. When Ruth was put on medical bed rest at the beginning of one marching season, Ed Miller, First Baptist Church worship leader and close friend, stepped in to help as another unpaid assistant! Spring band trips including the Fiesta Night Parade in San Antonio and the Cavalcade of Music, Colorado Springs, provided performance opportunities for the talented students.

In 1991, George accepted the position of Director of Bands for Glen Rose ISD. He joined Linda Gerber, the assistant high school director and head middle school director. These two created another mentorship bond as each helped the other grow professionally through team teaching all the Glen Rose bands. Assisting with the bands’ achievements were assistant directors Chris McLellan, Region 7 Executive Secretary; Ron Finley, retired and current church worship leader; Tina Parr, retired, Prosper ISD; and Valerie Kosa, currently directing a remarkable homeschool band program.

A career spent in small schools meant strong support from families, educators, boosters, and communities. That support helped the bands and their directors achieve success with consecutive UIL high ratings and sweepstakes awards and advancing in the TMEA Honor Band and ATSSB Outstanding Performance Series competitions. Individuals rose to the top in region and state UIL solo and ensemble contests, as well as All-District, All-Region, All-Area, and All-State placements.

George was honored to serve as the supervising teacher for music education majors including Melodianne Mallow; retired, Birdville ISD, and daughter of George’s supervising teacher James Mallow; Doug Fulwood, Fine Arts Administrator, Royse City ISD; Kenneth Gilbreath, Bastrop ISD (former Henrietta student); Michael Copeland, Stamford ISD; Phil Moore, Northside Baptist Church, Corsicana; and Tim Samples, Trinity Valley Community College.

In late spring of 2002, George received a call from Dr. Richard Floyd, Director of State Music Activities at the University Interscholastic League. During the conversation Dr. Floyd said, “I’ve got a job opening in our office that you do not want to turn down,” and he was correct. For the next sixteen years George served the Texas band, choir and orchestra students and directors as the UIL Assistant Director of Music Activities. His career in small schools meant there was

a strong advocate for small schools in the UIL office, but he served all groups, regardless of size or location. Assisting with the organization and management of the state marching band championship, state mariachi festival, state wind ensemble festival, and state solo and ensemble contest were all a part of George's job description, but more importantly, a way he could serve his colleagues and their students. Have a question about the PML (UIL's Prescribed Music List)? Ask George. Need to know previous UIL ratings? Ask George. Need some C&CR clarification? Ask George. His answer might be the specific page and paragraph number reference needed or "that's a school district decision" or "I'll find out and get back to you!" but it was always respectful and appropriate, even when it wasn't the answer wanted! He will even admit that he oversaw the UIL band sight-reading music composition process, organized music region reports, and completed many other tasks supporting the UIL region secretaries, school administrators, band/orchestra/choir directors, and all Texas music students. At George's last UIL state marching band contest in 2018, he was honored to present Brian Tillman, a former Henrietta drum major and now the Director of Bands at Irion County High School, the third-place trophy for Class 2A.

In addition to the previously mentioned TMEA region offices, George's passion to serve his colleagues and students was realized when he served as the Association of Texas Small School Bands President-Elect, President and Past-President from 1999-2003. During those years of service, George was instrumental in helping ATSSB & TMEA re-connect for the benefit of the small school all-state organizations. A special memory is getting to direct the combined TMEA All-State organizations in the "National Anthem" to commemorate the tenth anniversary of ATSSB. George was honored to be asked to speak at the 30th ATSSB Anniversary luncheon held in conjunction with the 2021 All-State Bands in Melissa. That event was a historical moment because ATSSB was the ONLY state organization to provide the all-state experience for their students!

While at UIL, George served on the National Federation of High School Activity Association Music Committee. The respect for Texas bands from other state activity associations was humbling. "George, how is this issue (whatever was currently being discussed) handled in Texas?" His answer is what the committee often recommended as a course of action. Colleagues, Texas band programs are respected and envied around our nation!

George has judged in almost every UIL region in Texas and in New Mexico, Colorado, Oklahoma, Indiana, and Tennessee. "Adjudicating is also a passion. I want to compliment and encourage students and directors through performance evaluation. Constructive comments and praise are how we grow in our art."

The move to East Texas in 2019 opened the door to new opportunities. George has been privileged to work with area band programs through clinics, sectionals, mentoring, and being a volunteer assistant with the hometown Mineola Sound of the Swarm at area and state marching competitions.

The Stricklands are members of First Baptist Church, Mineola. In each community where they have lived, George has served out his faith in their local church in a variety of ways: Worship leader, Sunday School teacher, Deacon, committee member, and activity facilitator. He is also a former Boy Scouts of America Den Leader and Scout Master.

George developed a love of traveling through family vacations driving across the United States; he has now visited 48 of the 50 states. That love for travel continues as he joins Melinda

and Mission City Travel and Kaleidoscope Adventures in facilitating student and adult group travel to U. S. destinations and abroad.

Family is the joy of his life. He and his wife Melinda are the proud parents of a college band director, Jeremy, Director of Bands, Tyler Junior College, Tyler, Texas. Jeremy and his wife Ashley are parents of the BEST grandchildren anywhere: Grandson Kaden, a seventeen-year-old trombone player, and twin thirteen-year-old granddaughters Hailey, flute, and Abby, trombone.

George is extremely honored to be inducted into the ATSSB Hall of Fame. The best honor though is to have been able to serve with and alongside colleagues in Texas music education and to experience music education and appreciation with gifted, energetic, and dedicated students that allowed him to be successful. Thank you, friends, colleagues, and former students, and “To God Be the Glory.”