

SCHOOLS

PHS drummers get taste of Brazilian samba



Piedmont High School drummers were praised by Samuel Daffner (right) for being "talented" and "motivated."

By Luke Tsai

It's just after 8:30 a.m. in the music building, and a group of Piedmont High School drummers have got a rollicking beat going. They march in place, grooving a little bit, while their instructor for

the day – Samuel Daffner, director of the East Bay Community Samba School – stomps his feet and implores the kids to keep it going: "Yes! Yes!" and "Keep your head up!" and "How are you going to see all of your fans?"



Photos by Jonathan Payne

Samuel Daffner (left) and Ray Perman, of the East Bay Community Samba School, gave PHS percussion students a crash course on Brazilian samba music.

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Daffner and fellow samba school member Ray Perman, both Piedmont residents, were there to teach a class-long workshop on Brazilian samba drumming to the high school percussion players, having received permission to do so from PHS band director Andria Mullan.

Daffner explained that he and Perman had been hoping to work with students at Piedmont High for quite some time – both as a way to share their love of music and as a form of community service.

"Brazilian music is quite unusual, and I don't think the high school kids, the percussionists, would normally get an introduction to that sort of thing," Perman added.

Samba drumming is loud and upbeat and fast-paced. Daffner noted that in the Brazilian culture it would be "a little bit out of the ordinary" to be doing it at 8:00 in the morning, unless you had been playing music all night.

Nevertheless, the early hour did nothing to keep the percussion students from digging right in, despite the clear departure from their regular band class routine. Daffner praised the PHS drummers for being "talented" and "motivated" and willing to learn something new.

"In fact, I would love to have grabbed a few of them for my group," he said.

Daffner added that he hopes that in the future some of those students will, indeed, check out his samba school and join the group for events like the upcoming Fourth of July Parade.

Perman is head of the percussion section of the Piedmont Community Band, whose only performance of the year is in the July 4 parade. Daffner's Samba School dancers and drummers have been the finale of Piedmont's 4th of July Parade for the past five years, leading parade viewers in a long, swaying procession down Highland Avenue to the park.

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School meetings open to the public

School board meeting tonight

The school board will meet tonight at 7:00 p.m. in City Hall, 120 Vista Ave. The board will take action on the Superintendent's recommendation to appoint PHS Principal Randy Booker as Assistant Superintendent of Educational Services. Additional announcements are expected regarding Booker's replacement and appointments in the Counseling Office. District retirees will be recognized.

District Technology Committee meeting today

The District Technology Advisory Committee meets today at 3:45 p.m. in the Middle School Multipurpose Room, 740 Magnolia Ave.

Budget Advisory Committee tomorrow

The Piedmont School District Budget Advisory Committee will have its final meeting of the 2010-11 fiscal year on Thursday, June 9, at 3:30 p.m. in the school district office, 760 Magnolia Ave.

Mock Trial – a 'thinking person's sport'

By Valerie Corvin

Hours of practice and hard work, lots of team spirit, scheduled scrimmages and competitions. Sound like another day at Piedmont High School on the baseball, basketball or football team? In this case, it's not an athletic endeavor, it is Mock Trial, a different type of team sport.

Mock Trial is a group of 24 students who agree to be part of a legal team from September through March. The team is given a criminal case from the Constitutional Rights Foundation to research, prepare and compete in mock trials against high schools in Alameda County. Over the course of 5-6 months, the students put in countless hours researching the law and U.S. Constitution, preparing pretrial motions, statements and arguments. Students meet regularly to review their research, hone their opening and closing statements, and practice their roles as witnesses, prosecutors, clerk, bailiff, and even as a court sketch artist.

"Mock Trial is a thinking person's sport," stated Courtney Goen, PHS Social Studies teacher and a Mock Trial coach, along with English teacher Rosie Reid and parent/lawyer Elizabeth Shaw.

"It takes a lot of work in and out of school to prepare for our competitions, but in addition, students learn so much about the law, U.S. Constitution, and the criminal justice system...this knowledge will stay with them for the rest of their lives."

"It may be labor intensive, but Mock Trial has another element too," added Goen. "Students learn important life skills. It teaches students how to be poised, think on their feet and conduct themselves in a professional manner. My favorite part is watching students gain confidence, and overall just blossom."

All their hard work paid off this year. The team won the Alameda County competition and went on to the state level where they placed in the top 25. There are more than 200 high school teams in California.

During the course of the year, the team becomes like a family. The students spend a lot of time together and learn how to work well together. They develop significant friendships, many of which will carry on beyond high school.

The team was aided by three attorneys from the community, Morgan Smith, Cliff Gardner and Joe Penrod, who provided advice and insight on the law and the cases. Also, Assistant Principal Rich Kitchens, a former Civics teacher and Mock Trial coach, worked with the team on pretrial motions.

"We are lucky that the Piedmont School District is supportive financially," noted Goen. "Parents are also so wonderful, driving to competitions, and helping in other ways. Plus the kids are awesome."

Openings on school district Citizens Oversight Committee



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Piedmont residents are invited to apply for a volunteer position on the School District's Citizens' Oversight Committee. The committee was established by law in accordance with Proposition 39 Bond E (Seismic Risk Reduction Program) approved by Piedmont voters in March 2006.

The application deadline is Thursday, July 14. For an online application and information on the charge and purpose of the committee, see the school district web site at www.piedmont.k12.ca.us, or contact the School Superintendent's office at 594-2614 (bfeusier@piedmont.k12.ca.us).