

Spontaneity earmarks Straw Hat Band

By JIM WINDELL

The Birmingham Straw Hat Band doesn't take itself very seriously. Dressed in straw hats and red vests, the smaller band that comes out of the larger Birmingham Community Band can be found around the area playing its version of happy, toe-tapping mu-

sic at nursing homes, hospitals, schools and convalescent centers.

It does take seriously the cause that keeps it going. Its project is raising money to provide seven half-scholarships each year to outstanding musicians from Birmingham schools to attend the Interlochen Arts Academy. Conductor Dave Falvey is always

happy to take time out from his insurance business to talk about the band that has been organized for two years. When he gets wound up about the band, his enthusiasm becomes contagious.

"It's corny, you know," he said in his office recently, "but it's fun. Everyone is in the band because they love to play and make people happy."

FALVEY RECOUNTED one time a few weeks ago when several band members were listening to a tape of one of their performances.

"They had to get out their instruments and play along. If you could have seen that. Here were several people around a little tape recorder playing with the music and tapping their feet." He laughed at the image. The Straw Hat Band, he went on to say, has spontaneously which he considers to be important.

Conceding the band could stand more practice, he emphasized that the band tried to make its listeners, often those who are shut in a convalescent home or

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hospital, happy. The secondary reason is to award musical scholarships to deserving Birmingham students. "I feel blessed that we can help kids and also play music," Falvey said.

Falvey is modest about his own contribution as conductor and trombone player. "I start 'em and stop 'em, but I don't consider myself a great conductor."

Falvey, however, is a musically accomplished man, who despite his reticence to talk about himself has won awards for his proficiency on the trombone. For 25 years led his own dance band. He worked his way through the University of Michigan as a musician in dance bands. The Birmingham Community Band, of which he is a trom-

bone player, and his leadership of the Straw Hat Band are means of fulfillment in his life.

"I wanted to go to Interlochen when I was a young kid, but never had a chance. Now the little band is part of my fulfillment as I can help send other kids to Interlochen. It's a love of making others happy," he said.

Falvey, a Bloomfield Township resident, is serious and sincere when it comes to raising money for the Interlochen Music Foundation. That seriousness, he says, is echoed by the other 15 band members who range in age from 17 to 65. In the dozen or so concerts the band plays free every year, they hope for donations to put back into the Scholarship Fund.

EVERY FEBRUARY auditions are held and seven young people are picked to receive the half scholarships. With the help of Seaholm High School Band director Robert Kutscher, other area high school band directors are picked to serve as judges to make the difficult selections of students.

A recent performance by the band was at the Bortz Green Lake Rest Haven in Orchard Lake. The band's renditions of "The Entertainer," "Way Down Yonder in New Orleans," "If You Knew Susie" or "Pack Up Your Troubles" are designed for two purposes. One is to make the people living in the rest home happy and maybe tap their feet for a couple of hours, but the other reason can best be summed up by goal-directed and smiling music-maker Falvey.

"We love to receive calls from people who want us to play. But, have your checkbook open for Interlochen when you call." With his broad smile and enormous enthusiasm, how could anyone refuse?



Dave Falvey plays trombone with the Birmingham Community Band and also is conductor of the Birmingham Straw Hat Band. (Photo by Tom Treuter)



The Straw Hat Band played at the annual Art-in-the-Park in late September in Birmingham's Shain Park. (Staff photo by Stephen Cantrell)

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