

Farmington Hills resident School band director moonlights at state fair



MINDY SAUNDERS/staff photographer

Farmington Hills resident Tony Aiuto has many tasks at the state fair. He's also found time in the past to bowl with Roy Rogers and lunch with Bob Hope.

By Carol Azizian
staff writer

IT WAS A FAMILIAR TUNE for the band leader from Southfield-Lathrup High School.

Once again, Tony Aiuto played an instrumental role in the opening of the Michigan State Fair.

The fair opened Thursday and continues through Labor Day.

Aiuto, who started out as a parade marshal for opening day activities in the 1950s, now supervises entertainment and special events.

"I really enjoy working at the fair," said the Farmington Hills resident. "It's a change of pace from teaching."

"It also gives me an opportunity to meet professional entertainers," he added. "Not many people have a chance to bowl with Roy Rogers or have lunch with Bob Hope."

PARTICIPANTS in fair activities will see Aiuto's touch wherever there's musical entertainment.

Aiuto recruited and auditioned high school students for the Michigan State Fair Honors Band.

He also set up programs for special days at the fair — Veteran's, Senior Citizen's and Service Club days.

And he reviewed contracts with professional entertainers to make sure fair officials complied with them.

"The job is demanding, but I like the responsibility," Aiuto said. "My involvement with the fair has increased over the years."

AIUTO'S INVOLVEMENT with the State Fair goes back to the late 1950s, when he was a parade marshal.

"I was studying music at Wayne State University and one of the instructors who was in charge of activities at the fair recruited students to help out as marshals," he said.

Over the years, Aiuto has worked odd jobs ranging from chauffeuring celebrities to and from the airport to overseeing entertainment events at the grandstand.

He remembers the time when Sonny and Cher performed at the fair and Cher rode a motorcycle with the police escort.

And the time he had dinner with Roy Rogers and Dale Evans and later went bowling with them.

"I even had a chance to chafeur Bob Hope and have lunch with him at MacDonald's."

"Big stars like Bob Hope don't make unusual demands on the chauffeurs or

other workers. They're really nice."

LAST YEAR, Aiuto helped organize a Labor Day parade at the fair to welcome presidential candidate Ronald Reagan to Detroit.

"My job was to round up clowns for the parade and tell them how to help out with security measures by looking for suspicious persons in the audience," Aiuto said.

Working with professional entertainers hasn't changed Aiuto's thoughts about his teaching career with Southfield Public Schools.

"My main job is teaching," he said. "Anything else is secondary."

"When I was younger, I wanted to be a symphony musician, but I soon realized that the competition is very keen."

"By the time I started college, I already knew I wanted to be a high school band director."

AIUTO PLAYS both clarinet and saxophone as well as other instruments.

He has performed big band jazz music with local dance bands, but says he doesn't look for those jobs anymore.

Aiuto's wife, Suzanne, is a former art teacher in the Southfield and Birmingham school districts.

He has three children who attend Farmington Public Schools.

"They played instruments in school, but none of my children wants to become a musician," Aiuto said.

"But they wouldn't miss the fair for anything," he added.

Senior citizen receives honor

A 70-year-old retired teacher from Oakland County has been named Senior Citizen of the Year for 1981.

Willard A. Hinz was in the category of leadership for his guidance in helping to found the Birmingham Area Seniors Coordinating Council.

A recognition ceremony to honor

Hinz will be held during the Michigan State Fair.

Hinz is active with the coordinating council, serves on the school district's advisory committee on the use of excess facilities and is social service chairman of the Redeemer Lutheran Church in Troy.

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