

PORT CHESTER & RYE BROOK

38 Broad Street
Port Chester, NY 10573

Westmore NEWS

Tel: 914-939-6864
Fax: 914-939-6877

'He believed in me,' PCHS graduate says about former band director Bob Vitti

PCHS community thanks the man who gave them 36 years

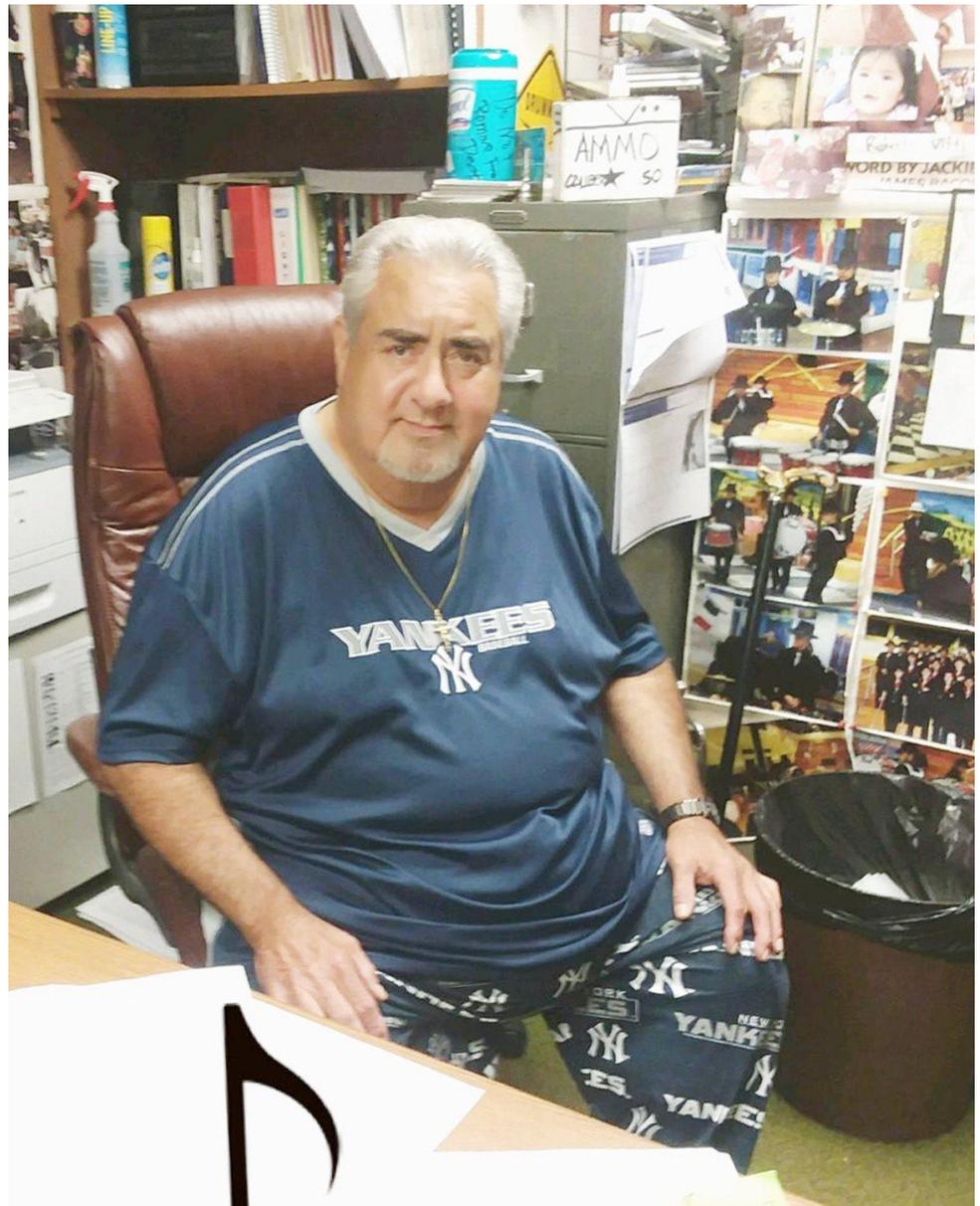
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For 36 years, Bob Vitti guided the hands of thousands of instrument-playing Port Chester High School students. Many of them have fond memories of their former band director. Although Vitti chose not to comment for an article that reflected his time at Port Chester High School, his students and many community members wanted to thank him for the time he gave them.

Senior Grace Simmons spent her first years of band under Vitti's wing.

"He's helped me become a leader and made me realize what it takes to be a leader," the drum major said.

He also taught her to never underestimate herself. It was his belief in her that pushed her to do better – she recalled practicing an hour a



After 36 years of working in the Port Chester High School music department, Bob Vitti is retiring. He will continue to be a temporary part-time music support specialist. Courtesy of Fran Vitti

day in the auditorium for her New York State School Music Association (NYSSMA) evaluation in hopes of being good enough to land the coveted drum major position last year. Any hopeful Port Chester drum major must do a NYSSMA audition. The 16-year-old was nervous, recalling she didn't think she could do it, but Vitti believed in her. Simmons ended up scoring 98/100 and snagged the drum major title for two years.

Their relationship transcended competitions and musical scores. Like many students, Simmons enjoyed spending her free time with her teacher.

"I used to spend my free periods in his office and eat lunch with him," the saxophone player said. "I miss being able to do that."

Her classmate Lauren Pellegrini shared her memories of Vitti as well. She wasn't known as Lauren to her former teacher, but as "Dillinger."

It was sophomore year and they were practicing when the 62-year-old needed Pellegrini's attention.

"I was in his room and he kind of forgot my name," the 17-year-old said with a laugh. "He called me 'Dillinger,' and I responded. The nickname stuck."

What also stuck with her was how he clung to what he was passionate about.

"If you have passion, you need to stick with it because that's what's going to help you in the long run," she said.

"Thank you for showing me one of my favorite activities. I will continue it in the future," she added."

Her future might hold a career in animation at either the Savannah College of Art and Design or Maryland Institute College of Art, but she wants to continue playing the baritone in a drum corps.

Recent graduate Elizabeth Montemurro and her older brother John were the first to jump on the opportunity to thank the man who taught them so much. Liz said Vitti was her biggest cheerleader who always saw her potential.

"Right from the get-go, he believed in me," the Muhlenberg College freshman said. It was that belief that pushed her to continue her love for music and pursue it as a career.

Through her band teacher and marching band director she learned, "If you're passionate about something, then make sure you stick with that in life. I don't think [Vitti] was ever as passionate about anything as he was in the band."

By the end of the phone call, the 18-year-old was tearing up as she wished her role model the best. "Thank you for supporting me, loving me and loving this band," Liz said. "The band's not going to be the same without you."

Her older brother John, who graduated two years before Liz, took time from his family's vacation to explain just how much Vitti's influence continues to impact his life at Boston College. He thought he would give up playing his trombone and baritone the second he was out of high school, but he still picks up his trombone whenever he has the time.

"I'd like to say that I hope you're really proud of all you've accomplished," John said about Vitti. "You've really done wonders for all of the kids throughout the years. You mentored me and inspired me to keep playing an instrument throughout my college career when I thought I'd quit after high school. But you motivated me to continue playing. Good luck in your retirement."

Remembering his former teacher, it was the times they weren't in the school that stuck out the most.

"It was more his demeanor at band camp," John said. "He would never get flustered. He was the best at really motivating us to get the kids to really perform to the best of their abilities. You could tell he really cared. He was never abrasive. He was a great motivator; he was very funny. At band camp, he really kept us going. He was a great band director and I'm sure he's going to be missed."

Board of Education member and band parent Carolee Brakewood took time out of her vacation in Maine to talk about Vitti's influence on her family. She praised him for his fantastic leadership over the past 25 years and highlighted his role in infusing his extensive knowledge into the band and ensuring repeated success in competition.

"Bob Vitti is loved by students and parents alike as well as the whole community," she continued. "To watch him in rehearsal is to watch a man who barely has to raise his voice yet has complete control over 150 students; he has a certain aura about him that commands respect and a very clear vision of what he wants musically and visually to make a show spectacular. He has a special way of connecting with students, many of whom considered his office a favorite destination during school lunch or free periods."

Port Chester Music Department Chairman Ken Kraut said working with Vitti for so many years has been a pleasure.

"We had a good partnership," Kraut said in an email. "I'm glad he's helping us in the transition because no one in the business has the vision for one amazing show after another like Bob does."

Online, people came in droves to wish Vitti well, to congratulate him and to reminisce about their time in the Port Chester auditorium and on the field with him at the helm. On the Westmore News Facebook post, published on Friday, Aug. 4 with the article titled "Bob Vitti retires as PCHS band director," more than 20 people commented, wishing the man who gave half his life to the Port Chester School District good luck in his retirement.

Joan Giammarino Carriero wrote: "There isn't enough words to express what Bob Vitti has contributed to our high school band and the thousands of students he has touched and made a difference in their young lives, including my own children. I am hoping he will have an integral part of our future bands going forward. I wish him much health and happiness in his retirement and pray he stays near and dear to our 'Pride of Port Chester!'"

On the same post, shared to the Facebook group "Making Port Chester a Better Place," Bill Jensen wrote, "Congratulations and good luck in your new ventures. Remember all the great times with the PCHS marching band. Have the next generation coming through for the high school band. Christine's youngest daughter plays trombone for Bellefonte High School in Pa. Karen's Jenna plays sax and now bassoon in the middle school and Karah will start with the sax. Good luck again and thank you."

Mike Miceli, former assistant band director, was promoted to band director. He is leading the marching band this year.



Former Port Chester High School Band Director Bob Vitti didn't let anything stop him from cheering on his students. Despite medical problems, he attended every marching band performance he could, even using a golf cart to get close to the students to cheer them on. Courtesy of Fran Vitti

ROBERT C. VITT BAND DIRECTOR



Hired in 1987 as a percussion instructor, Bob Vitti never once lost his pride in Port Chester. He even directed from the bleachers at Ryan Stadium. Courtesy of Fran Vitti