

WINDJAMMERS HALL OF FAME

James A. Perkins (1936-1990), 1992 Inductee

By Rod Everhart, WJU #1351



James Arthur Perkins was a Chatfield, MN attorney who was president of the Chatfield Brass Band and founder of the Chatfield Brass Band Free Music Lending Library. While law may have been Jim's calling, music was truly his passion.

He is best remembered for reviving the Chatfield Brass Band in 1969 and creating the lending library in 1970. Unfortunately, he died young of a heart attack on Christmas Day 1990 at age 54.

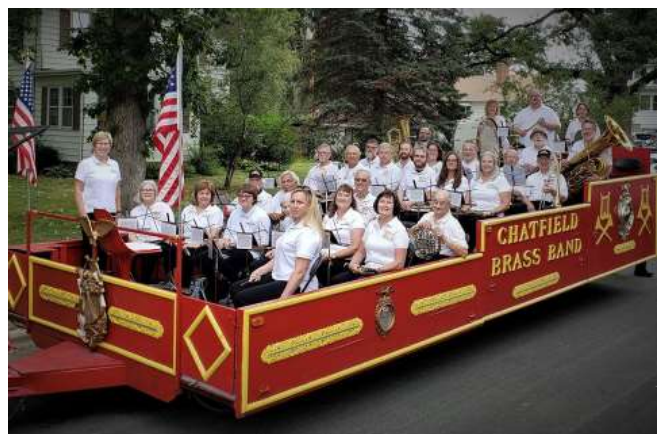
Perkins was born April 28, 1936 in Rochester, MN. He graduated from Chatfield High School in 1954 and the University of Minnesota in 1960. Prior to starting his senior year of college, on August 29, 1959 he married Margaret Oberg in Vasa, MN. Next up was his getting his law degree

from the University in 1964 and joining his father's family law firm. Jim and Margaret had two sons, Justin and Gabriel.

Jim was well-known for both his trademark waxed mustache and his commitment to preserving brass music for posterity. Since Chatfield hadn't had a city brass band since World War II, Jim took on its revival, first seeking out former area high school band members and recruiting them to join a brass band to perform at local events. The first rehearsal was held October 1, 1969 with 14 playing members and Vern Anderson as conductor. Within a year's time, they had played 21 gigs and increased in size with the addition of woodwinds. Soon, the band had appearances at the State Fair and annual Veterans Day Concerts.

Jim worked tirelessly to promote the band. Originally organized as an all-male brass band, the group evolved into a traditional Concert Band. In 1973 The Chatfield Brass Band was incorporated and achieved tax-exempt status. In September of that year, the band invited women to join them for the first time.

Beginning in 1973 fundraising for a circus-style bandwagon began. Clarinetist and engineer, John Willaman, designed the wagon. A mobile home chassis was its base. The bandwagon body was built thanks to the Southeastern Vocational Center's Building Trade students. The wagon expands from 8 feet wide to 12 feet for parades and is 26 feet long. It has three level platforms. In 1976, the red and gold bandwagon was dedicated by none other than Merle Evans (WJU Hall of Fame 1974) and remains in use to this day.



Chatfield Brass Band's Bandwagon in 2019 Western Days Parade. Photo from Chatfield Brass Band's Facebook page

Once the band started taking shape, naturally more music was needed. So, Jim made the rounds of the high school band directors asking them for their old, unwanted charts. Pretty soon, it became a national and sometimes international project. Quickly, boxes of music began piling up in Perkins' attic. As that continued, it was moved to Chatfield's City Hall and later the Thurber Community Building. Eventually the Lending Library got its own dedicated building.

In 1979, Perkins convinced the Minnesota Legislature to fund \$50,000 toward constructing a 3,000-square-foot facility to house all the music. It was built on land donated by Jim and Margaret and dedicated in 1981. Perkins referred to the building as a "national treasure." The library has collected and cataloged more than 47,600 pieces, many of which are no longer in print.



Perkins was a member of the Association of Concert Bands and the American Sheet Music Society. He was an honorary member of the Detroit Concert Band, and an active member of Windjammers Unlimited (WJU). In 1979, he was elected as a WJU Trustee.

Jim often contributed articles to the *Circus Fanfare*, including pieces on Merle Evans and Paul Yoder. The band he revived played for President Carter in 1978. In 1979 they performed for the ASBDA Convention in Minneapolis followed by a concert at the Lake Harriet Band Shell where Garrison Keillor emceed the event. In 1982, the band traveled to Washington, DC to play with the U.S. Marine Band at the gravesite of John Philip Sousa and they also performed with the Baltimore Symphony on "Stars and Stripes Forever". Later in 1982, Meredith Willson directed the band in playing "76 Trombones" during the Western Days Musical.

Jim Perkins' legacy has now celebrated its 50th Anniversary, with Carmen Narveson as director since 1997. The band has continued to grow and change with the times while enriching the quality of life in Chatfield, MN and surrounding communities and preserving a store of band music that might otherwise have been lost forever.

James A. Perkins' achievements were recognized by Windjammers Unlimited in January 1992 when he was named to the Windjammers Hall of Fame.

