

All Pepped Up

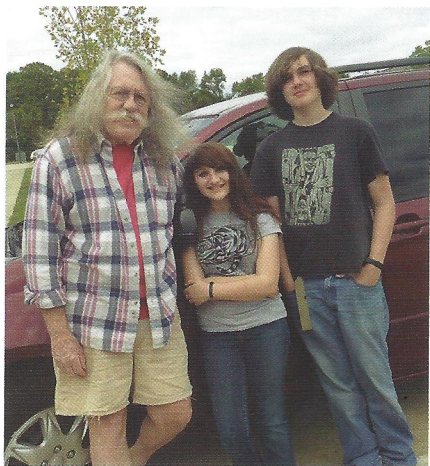
In the 1960s, the High Tides band lent enthusiasm to men's basketball games.

by Haley Herfurth

When Don Alexander thinks back on his years at the Capstone, some of his fondest memories are pinstriped, or filtered through the glass of a car window. As members of the High Tides pep band, he and five other students carted their instruments and their signature straw hats and red-and-white-striped sportcoats around in a trailer hooked to the back of a station wagon, barreling down the highway to Kentucky or Florida or wherever the men's basketball team was playing that night.

The precursor to the Million Dollar Band's current athletic pep bands, the High Tides existed only in the 1960s, replaced by the MDB's groups upon the opening of the Memorial Coliseum (now Coleman Coliseum) in 1968, according to Alexander. "We played for men's basketball games in Foster Auditorium and went on the road for away games within the SEC," he said. The band usually bunked at the same motels as the team, and Alexander remembers getting to know the players and the coaches. "Things were pretty cozy back then," he said.

"I remember my parents getting to see me play on TV," he added. "We were playing Vanderbilt, and my parents were watching the televised broadcast, and they showed us playing. It was my first claim to fame."



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The High Tides performed mostly Dixieland music at the games, like "South Rampart Street Parade," and UA-band favorites, like "Yea Alabama." They were given a designated section in which to sit and set up their instruments, all of which they usually moved to center court during halftime. "Every time we would set up, some kids would come over and ask our drummer if he could play [the popular Surfari's song] 'Wipeout,'" Alexander said. "For years, whenever I would write him or send him a Christmas card, I would ask him if he could still play 'Wipeout.'"

Already a member of the MDB when he saw a flier for the High Tides on the bulletin board in the old Student Union Building (now Reese Phifer Hall), Alexander borrowed a practice tuba from longtime band director Col. Carleton Butler and headed for auditions. "We were not University-official—not affiliated with the University band system or the music department," he said. "I don't know what budget item funded our trips, but we had University-excused absences."

As a member of the Mallet honor society and Theta Xi fraternity, for which he served as a representative in the Student Government Association,

Don Alexander with his two youngest children, who are following in his musical footsteps

and a student worker at the computer center—which at the time housed an early IBM and later a UNIVAC Solid State 80—Alexander remained busy on campus even after the High Tides disbanded.

After graduating in 1970 with a degree in mathematics, he stayed on campus to complete his master's in the same field, finishing in 1972. He also earned a doctorate in mathematics from the University in 1979, completing it while commuting from Tuscaloosa to the University of Montevallo, where he'd been hired to teach.

During his 33 years at UM, Alexander continued practicing his love for music by playing tuba with the UM Wind Ensemble, and helping his children learn to love it, too. He has a son and daughter who graduated from Auburn University, and two younger children—a daughter in sixth grade and a son in ninth. "My son lives and breathes marching band, as did my grown son," he said, adding that his oldest daughter plays flute and the younger one is starting to pick up instruments.

As for what music has given him, that would include some wonderful college memories. "It was great fun," Alexander said of his time with the High Tides. "We were safe, and goofy, and we had a lot of fun representing UA—and people enjoyed us."