

The music is only part of the story for Erica Shirley and Ryan Jobe.

When you manage as many individuals and instruments as Shirley and Jobe do with the New Hope High School band, there are plenty of issues that come up during the season.

Will the students get along? Will they hold each other accountable? Will they encourage each other? Will they come together and perform as one unit?

Those questions don't create nearly as much anxiety for band directors and assistant band directors when their students listen, work hard and believe in each other.

That mentality was at the heart of one of the New Hope High band's biggest days in recent memory. On Tuesday morning, 10 members of the school's band celebrated receiving scholarships to continue their musical careers at the next level.

Da'Laya Coble (trumpet), Talan Evans (percussion), Jeremiah Linebarker (alto saxophone), Jamaya O'Briant (alto sax), Tyson Phinisey (percussion), Cedriuna Shumpert (clarinet), Paris Harris (alto sax) and Ky'Asia Topps (trombone) signed to attend East Mississippi Community College in Scooba, while Azharia Petty (alto sax) and Taliyah Thomas (clarinet) signed to attend Itawamba C.C. in Fulton.

Shirley, who is in her 10th year as band director at New Hope, said this is the most students from one class to sign with colleges in her tenure.

"This has been a really good senior class," Shirley said. "They are hard workers, and they have always been leaders. They are going to be missed, that's for sure. They all have different personalities, and they all bring something different and something special to the group."

Shirley called this year's group "unmatched" because the most students she remembers signing in one year prior to Tuesday was seven.

Jobe, who joined the program as assistant band director prior to the start of the school year, echoed Shirley's assessment and stressed that all of the seniors are "great players and great people."

Shirley and Jobe said being a "great person" is an essential element with such a big group because they have to rely on students and section leaders to "fill in the gaps" and keep things moving in the right direction.

Jobe and Shirley offer different perspectives on how that worked this season. In his first year with the band, Jobe said the students welcomed him and he could tell the students had "bought in" and know how they were supposed to do things. As a result, he said the season flowed extremely well.

Shirley said those qualities helped many of the students earn scholarships without having to try out. She said many of the college coaches recognize the quality of performer and team member they are going to gain if they get a member of the New Hope High band.

"That says a lot about their work ethic," Jobe said. "That's what makes the program better."

Jobe said it was gratifying to see all of the students choose to be great people because it is an individual choice that takes a personal dedication.

"When they all come together like that, that is what makes us tear up," Jobe said. "We have a very diverse group and it works because they all buy into the mentality of doing it together."

That feeling warms the heart of Shirley, who was a member of the band at New Hope High. She said it has been special to see all of the seniors mature from their time in middle school.

“It is like a parent and these are your children and you’re watching them grow up, and I am watching them grow up in more ways than one,” Shirley said. “It is seeing them from their first days, when nobody sounds great, keep working at it and physically, musically and as a whole person growing up. It almost rips your heart out because I know they have to leave me.”

The New Hope High Symphonic Band received a Superior rating in on-stage performance and an Excellent rating in Sight Reading at the Mississippi High School Activities Association Evaluation (MHSAA) in Oxford.

New Hope also received an overall Superior rating at the Hoover Invitational Marching Festival and finished third in its class on Oct. 21, 2023, in Hoover, Alabama. It also earned best in class percussion. On Oct. 7, 2023, New Hope received a score of one in drum major and percussion and an overall score of one at the MHSAA Region 1 Marching Band Evaluation in Tupelo.

The band also finished third in its class at the Northeast Mississippi C.C. Regional, seventh at the Class 5A State Championships (fifth in Music & Percussion, which was the best finish in program history) and set school records for Music & Percussion scores.

The NHHS band will hold its spring concert at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, May 7, in the high school gym. Admission is \$5, but LCSD faculty and staff will earn free admission with their badges. Children 5 years old and under also will be admitted free.