

# Best Use of Graphics or Illustrations

First place, Alabama Press Association (2009)

## THE SOUND<sub>of</sub> SILENCE

After some 330 school layoffs county-wide, Daphne High's choral program hangs in the balance—but only the state can save it now

**Editor's Note:** This is the second in a series of articles the Daphne Bulletin plans to publish on school programs affected by the economic recession.

Are you a student, parent of a student, or faculty member at a Daphne or Spanish Fort school affected by budget cuts?

E-mail [bulletin@gulfcoastnewspapers.com](mailto:bulletin@gulfcoastnewspapers.com), or call 626-9300 during regular office hours, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. We may share your story in a future edition.

By Thomas Boni

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Allen Barber—president of the Jubilee Sounds, Daphne High School's choral program—just wants other students to have the same opportunity he had as a freshman: to express oneself.

"I would hate for other students to have to lose that just because the school has only a certain number of teachers they can keep," said the senior, who has participated in the choral program all four of his high-school years. "It's just ridiculous."

Barber—a University of Montevallo-bound student set to graduate May 18—plans to study mass communications and hopes to become a radio broadcaster. If all works out, he said he can credit choral lessons.

"I know the choir has toned my voice (for broadcasting)," he said.

Next fall, DHS students with similar goals will have to seek private lessons—or do without a controlled environment of expression—as Donna Toler, the Sounds' instructor, won't be on the payroll.

Ditto for the course she teaches, which last week she learned was the latest casualty of necessary budget cuts due to a crippled economy. That, she believes, leaves musically gifted students less incentive.

"Choir ... is the thing that keeps them coming to school and dealing with all the academic things that they're trying to deal with," Toler said.

**"I'm like everybody else, hoping that some of the stimulus money finds its way to our neck of the woods and that we're able to save the program; as of now, that's not the case. But, we're still hopeful."**

—Daphne High School Principal Don Blanchard



Blanchard



Illustration by Thomas Boni

The Baldwin County Board of Education, facing a \$23 million deficit, must decide which programs to keep and which teachers must be let go; school choir programs have been the most affected, according to Vicky Cook, the school system's fine-arts and library supervisor.

The lifelong music lover as a student couldn't have dreamed such a fate could befall a high-school music program, and said she can't fathom what her students are experiencing, having heard the news.

"I can only imagine how these students who are planning on getting scholarships" in music will cope with the program's loss, she said. "Without the choral background they are seriously held back from getting a choral scholarship."

DHS Principal Don Blanchard holds out hope that the program's loss is a temporary setback, noting the Alabama Legislature has yet to decide on apportionments from its share of the federal stimulus funding, which reportedly includes \$1 billion for education.

"I'm like everybody else, hoping that some of the stimulus money finds its way to our neck of the woods and that we're able to save the program; as of now, that's not the case," Blanchard said. "But, we're still hopeful."

Daphne High School lost 16 units—the legislature's term for teachers—among a reported 330 positions county-wide, according to a Baldwin County schools spokesperson.

The cuts put a damper on year-end spirits.

"Because some of these teachers I consider friends and they've all done a good job for us, to be in this situation casts a dark cloud over what normally would be a happy time," Blanchard said, referring to commencement.

Some non-tenured teachers' programs affected by budget cuts won't themselves be cut, according to school officials, but that means tenured teachers rehired for next school year must take up the slack.

Judges said: "Great creativity, especially since the art had to be built from the 'ground up!'"