

FACES IN THE CROWD

COMMUNITY

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Tony Bullard ALL

Tony Bullard: For the Chronicle **PASSION FOR PERCUSSION**: Lamar Burkhalter is the band director for the Houston Texans Bullpen Pep Band and founder of the Percussion One Foundation.

LAMAR BURKHALTER

- **Age:** 45
- **Occupation:** Band director and drummer for the Houston Texans.
- **Community Connection:** Lives in Spring with his wife Kay and 10-year-old daughter, Hope.
- **Quick Quote:** "I've always had a vision that the drum line belonged in pro sports entertainment."
- **Fast Fact:** • Percussion One regularly holds practices at Lone Star College-Cy-Fair Campus and at Klein High School

Lamar Burkhalter wants to put percussion players on the map, and as a drummer who heads up the Houston Texans' Bullpen Pep Band and founder of the nonprofit Percussion One Foundation, he's well on his way.

"I'm trying to get percussion into every corner of the community," he said. "It's done so much for my life."

A musician for most of his youth and all of his adult life, Burkhalter was approached by Texans owner Bob McNair nearly nine years ago about working with the then-fledgling Houston football franchise.

"After many meetings and proposals, we came up with the idea for a 55-piece pep band," he said. "It's not a full marching band and it's not just a combo."

Burkhalter said the band's brass and drum lines are active before the game, entertaining tailgaters for 2½ hours with upbeat songs and musicians who are able to easily move through the crowd.

"I constructed it like a mini drum line because we needed to be loud and we needed to be mobile," he said. "We interact with the tailgaters as we go from tent to tent and they know us by name. The tailgaters love the band and the band loves them."

Despite his role as the band's director, Burkhalter is not missing out on the action.

"Just standing there waving your arms isn't nearly as fun as playing, so I conduct from a set of drums," he said. "We spend time out there in the brutal heat, but we love every minute of it."

Just before the game starts, the full band assembles for a concert and aims to get the audience, particularly the little ones, in on the action.

"We do a show in Budweiser Plaza and the crowd is within 20 to 40 feet of us so they get the full force of the band. We usually carry tambourines, shakers and cowbells as we really go out of our way to get people involved in the music making," he said. "We get the kids dancing."

But it's not just fun and games for this life-long music man. Burkhalter has taken steps to ensure that young Houston-area drummers are given an opportunity to thrive as he has.

In addition to his work with the Texans, the former band teacher at Westfield High School in the Spring school district created the Percussion One Foundation in 1994 to nurture and to promote area junior high and high school percussionists.

Burkhalter, who called Westfield's music program top notch, said he began to realize how other schools' programs were lacking as he began traveling around Houston to judge music contests.

"I've been an educator all my life, that is my passion, so in 1994 I ventured out with Spring and Klein ISD kids and started Percussion One," he said. "It's a tool to promote more percussion education and to give these kids what they don't get in school."

Now with about 45 high school students and even more junior high pupils involved, Percussion One regularly holds practices at Lone Star College-Cy-Fair Campus and at Klein High School.

The group, which is made up of musicians who are required to successfully audition before joining, has even built an impressive performance resume over the years.

"We've done numerous charity events," Burkhalter said. "In 1997, we were invited by the Russian Minister of Culture to do a 10-day concert tour of Moscow, and then in 2000, we were invited to play the World Expo in Hanover, Germany. I'm proud of the longevity and the international exposure."