

# Watsonville Band prepares for historic march



Greg Pio/Special to the Sentinel

By **DAVE BROCKMANN**  
Sentinel staff writer

When Bert Viales held the conductor's baton for the Watsonville Band for the first time, John F. Kennedy was in the second year of his presidency.

In 34 years, he's conducted the band in over 600 performances in locations such as Montreal, Mexico City, Europe and Australia.

"We have played in many places around the world, but I think playing in Washington, D.C., on the Fourth of July is our most important date ever because it's our nation's capital," the soft-spoken Viales said.

That date is Thursday, when the 66-member marching band struts down Constitution Avenue in the National Independence Day Parade, and later in the evening when the 74-member concert band performs at the White House staff party for 8,000-10,000 guests on the South Lawn.

Never before in history, dating back to 1801 when President Thom-

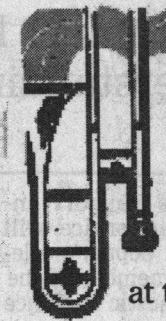
as Jefferson held the first Fourth of July party on the South Lawn, has a civilian band received such a prestigious invitation.

"I think the band is ready," Viales said after Monday's rehearsal at the band's headquarters in Arlington, Va. "Everyone was on time, and I think our music selection means a little more now that band members have had the opportunity to see history for themselves." A final rehearsal is scheduled tonight at the Doubletree ballroom.

The musicians, family and boosters have had a steady diet of sight-seeing since arriving over the weekend.

Band members see this as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

Drummer Dana Sales, a Watsonville Realtor and former Pajaro Valley Unified School District board member, said Thursday's parade will be a homecoming for him. Twenty years ago he was a member of the U.S. Navy Drum and Bugle Corps and marched in



The  
Watsonville  
Band

at the White House

Jimmy Carter's inaugural parade. "This is going to be incredible," he said. "To march down Constitution Avenue twice is going to be something special, and then to play at the White House — that's exciting."

Tenor saxophone player Raymond Speltz from Boulder Creek only joined the band last September, but he may have the biggest thrill of his life if President Clinton grabs his saxophone and plays a few bars when the band is per-

forming on the driveway near the South Lawn. "We may have to play a duet," he said with a grin.

Claire Espindola from Freedom is a 38-year band veteran who plays the bells, technically called a glockenspiel. She said playing in the band is a way she contributes to the community, and that it would be fun to play with Clinton.

Band manager Ed Pio has been with the band for four decades, and agrees with Viales that Thursday's events will be the "pinnacle" for the amateur band. Pio quipped: "It's a pretty spectacular thing, and nothing we have accomplished in the past will come close to this. This is better than I dreamed. There's going to be some teary eyes, believe me."

Among the songs Viales has chosen for Thursday night's concert program are "Star Spangled Spectacular," some John Philip Sousa marches, "Silhouettes," and "I Left My Heart in San Francisco."

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