

# MUSIC MEETS COMMUNITY SERVICE

Every year around the holidays, Ridge View Music Director Willie Peacock invites students to another outlet near to his heart. Peacock, who is the Pastor of the Zion Baptist Community Church, organizes the “Zion Feed the Community”—an annual event that offers an array of supportive services to those in need in Aurora and the Denver Metro area.

Ridge View students arrive at the church early to set up. Then, depending on their skills, assist the other volunteers. Students enrolled in RVA’s Barbering Certification program offer those in need haircuts and shaves. Culinary Arts students assist volunteers in preparing warm homemade meals; students also assist in the delivery of warm meals to families, senior citizens and others who are homebound. Other students help organize clothing, shoes and backpack donations, or assist with community outreach by distributing church literature outlining the schedule of charitable events and church services.

Zion Baptist Church, a 151-year establishment in the community, impresses students with its old, stone building and heartfelt charitable events. The annual event impacts roughly 3,000-5,000 people in need each year and is as much a part of Ridge View’s culture as its marching band.



## Ridge View Marching Band: Changing Lives Through Music & Marching

At over 6’6”, this Pastor and retired Colonel possesses the unique combination of kindness and authority to command Ridge View Academy’s Marching Band and JROTC program. Willie Peacock, who has been at the heart of RVA’s music program for nearly twenty years, hasn’t just taught his students the motions of reading music scales on a page. He has infused the campus with the spirit of music, the individual expression of personal experience, and the power of music to unite individuals into a community.

Seventeen years ago, Mr. Peacock attended his first graduation at Ridge View Academy. As a long-time musician who played band throughout high school and college, he thought that RVA’s graduation ceremony seemed empty without the presence of a band. The idea became a reality the following season when twelve students donned band uniforms and carried their instruments across sport fields, into pep rallies and graduation ceremonies. “This was really the first music program of its kind,” said Mr. Peacock.

Marching bands are unique among extracurricular activities, which encourage creative expression. According to a study conducted by Kalamazoo University, marching bands’ unique demands of discipline and dedication may not only make stu-

dents “smarter,” but it gives them unique skills that include: listening, following directions and time management. These skills are paired with changes in the brain’s structure. By scanning the brains of musicians, researchers have found an enlarged planum temporale region—the part of the brain related to reading skills—as compared to non-musicians. Plus, marching band has the unique ability to promote positive social relationships due to the demands of cooperation and teamwork.

For his music students, Mr. Peacock notices that the skills learned from playing a drum or trumpet go beyond hand-eye coordination. “I think music helps our students acquire coping skills. It’s a way for them to hone their attention and to release their pent-up anxiety. The patterns of rhythms help them cope throughout the day. Even though many students want to become hip-hop artists—and to rap about past experiences in their lives—the study of music theory, time signatures and tempo reaches students, teaching them the language of the soul.”

In addition to directing the band, Mr. Peacock encourages students to participate in an annual food drive that is organized through his church. For nearly twenty years, students who have learned to produce music instead of violence also learn

the value of giving back. This impulse translates back into the campus culture that the band exudes. When you’re there, you can’t help but feel it.

Even RVA Program Director Jay Koedam notices a difference on campus when the band is present. “The band really normalizes what we do here,” he said. “When the band is practicing on the campus, it lifts everyone’s spirits—staff, students—everyone.”

This year, the music program has expanded to include a new vocation called “Audio Production.” “Since a lot of our students are drawn to hip-hop, we purchased ‘Audio Tool’—a technology that enables them to master, mix and record music,” said Koedam. The credits earned in this new course are transferable to community colleges.

Five recent RVA graduates have continued their education in college—and continue their interest in music. One student, in particular reminds Mr. Peacock of the transformative power of music. “I had this student years ago who was having a hard time. He had a great love of music—and a passion for a drum called a quad. His love for music helped him cope with his problems and with his family. He kept up with the music and made some great changes in his life. He went to college and studied music. Now, he’s married with two children.”

