

# Longtime Hobo Band member remembered fondly

by Bob Shryock, Times Editorial Staff

First assistant director Phil Blackman, running an Original Hobo Band, Inc. rehearsal one Thursday night at Hobo Hall, told the musicians to "keep an eye out" when they got to a section in the score.

Richard "Rich" Bimmer took Blackman literally. He put his tuba down, walked to the podium, and handed Blackman his artificial eye, amusing everyone.

"With Rich, you never knew what would come out," says Alan Weinstein, who replaced Bimmer as Hobo Band business manager.

Bimmer, 69, a man Weinstein says "loved the band," died Feb. 16, just four days after attending his last rehearsal. He logged nearly 50 years with the popular band, serving in numerous ways: Tuba, bells, president, and business manager extraordinaire.

And his fellow bandsmen didn't forget him. At the jam-packed memorial service at Trinity Christian Chapel, they played "When the Saints Go Marching In." Later, at a dinner reception hosted by the Bimmers at Hobo Hall, the band performed some of his favorite band selections.

Bimmer and his wife Connie owned and operated Antique Trains for more than 30 years in Washington Township. Formerly a district sales manager for Reynolds Aluminum, Bimmer was known throughout the region for his expertise in model trains sales and repairs.

But life member Bimmer may have been best known for his allegiance to the Hobo Band.

"The Hobos and his trains were his life," says Hap McCleish, another long-time Hobo bandsman, close friend and former president. "Rich was a good member and a guy with a brilliant mind."

McCleish recalls the fiscally-savvy Bimmer "coming up with the ideas" that enabled the band to underwrite 1972 and 1974 trips to Holland and Belgium to showcase their talent and trademark tattered uniforms.

And it was Bimmer who had the connections that made them regulars at the Miss America Pageant Parade for many years. The Hobos

were one of the few paid bands in the pageant.

Says Weinstein, "Rich had a way of making people feel comfortable."

Bimmer left the Hobos for a brief period, objecting to the band's decision to accept women for first time. But he eventually apologized, admitted he was wrong, returned to march in the Desert Storm parade, and never again left. As a show of his affection for the band, he had his shoulder

tattooed with the Hobo logo.

As strong as he was in Hobo Band management, Bimmer was equally adept as a musician. He started on the tuba, shifted to bells, and concluded his career back playing tuba.

And all of this despite suffering from diabetes since childhood and losing an eye.

"He kept fighting the odds," Weinstein says. "His last performance was a January 29 concert for the Wiley Christian Retirement Community in Marlton when he played his tuba on stage for an hour. The band was an integral part of his life. He loved playing and loved performing. He was even involved in the renovation of Hobo Hall. Rich had a hand in everything."

"We'll miss the guy," McCleish says. "He was a great friend. And he was dedicated."

