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**Wanda
Orton**

Losing Lee Brigadiers a sad day for all of us

Say it isn't so.

Because of dwindling membership, the Lee Brigadiers, the drum and bugle corps of Robert E. Lee High School, is disbanding.

Only 20 students signed up for the corps this past school year and apparently the prospects for the new school year were just as discouraging.

According to In Step, a publication of the Goose Creek CISD, the remaining members this fall will have the opportunity to join the band, take a dance class for physical education credit or take another elective course.

In the district newsletter, fine arts coordinator Nelson Nolden recapped unsuccessful efforts made to breathe new life into the drum and bugle corps.

He said he visited the Brigadiers class and attended after-school practices and home games to assess the program.

In a move to save the organization, the district hired band director Edward Dowler to direct the Brig, with Carrie Trawick serving as his assistant.

Nolden, in the newsletter, said Dowler had shown "tremendous care and dedication to producing a quality organization."

Also, the school previously brought back retired Brig director Kathryn Wright to revive interest in the organization.

isng representatives were given the opportunity to recruit future freshmen by visiting the junior schools, Nolden said.

That's enough from the newsletter. From here on, this former Brig mom will do the talking.

Disbanding the Brigadiers, in my opinion, is one of the saddest, most discouraging things ever to occur at Robert E. Lee High School.

If we treasure tradition, how could we let this happen?

Why hasn't there been a greater outcry from the community about this?

Are most people not aware of the decision?

Do they know but don't know what to do about it?

Or do they know and don't care?

Another question, this one for the high school kids:

Is the drum and bugle corps outdated, considered a relic in the new millennium?

Now, if I were to answer that question, I'd say definitely not. Personally, I would want to keep the Lee Brigadiers in the 21st century just as they were in the 20th.

I'm 66, not 16, and I don't like change.

But if the school can attract members and instill enthusiasm by coming up with a new and different kind of drill team, go for it.

Form a committee of students to make a survey and determine what they want in a drill team.

For new ideas, the students could visit other schools, interview drill team leaders and members.

One more and I'll quit with the questions.

Who needs a drill team, any way?

Allow me to answer me.

Keep in mind that entertaining at halftime and marching in parades are only part of the reason for the existence of a drill team or a band.

While participating, the students develop discipline, a work ethic, sense of teamwork, pride, confidence, self-esteem and friendships that last a lifetime. The experience is invaluable.

Students need drill teams — and all kinds of extra-curricular activities — and we should fill that need.

Schools need to give, not give up.

Wanda Orton's column appears each Monday in The Baytown Sun. Her daughter Jan was a twirler in the Brigadiers, graduating from REL in 1979, and most blessed to have had the remarkable Kathryn Wright as her director. Her e-mail address is wan@ctesc.net.