

School of Music director completes running goal, fundraiser for pipe organ

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Bill Ballenger, director of music at Texas Tech, completed 1,000 miles in a fundraiser for the Holtkamp organ Saturday. File Photo

Creating an enormous backdrop of more than 3,000 pipes in Texas Tech's Hemmle Recital Hall stands the Holtkamp Pipe Organ. Donated in 1977, the organ is in a desperate state of disrepair.

After pledging to run 1,000 miles from Sept. 1 through April 1 to save the organ, Bill Ballenger, director of the School of Music, completed his running goal and also the fundraising goal Saturday morning on Tech campus with his friends, family and supporters.

"It is pretty awesome because Bill Ballenger is finishing his 1,000 miles," said Lindsay Abbott, a sophomore music education major from Sugar Land. *"Without his help and support we couldn't renovate the organ."*

Abbott was among many students and faculty braving the early morning Lubbock wind to celebrate the goal's completion. Abbott was the first person to finish the one-mile run.

Planned by Tech professor of music Michael Berry, runners had the choice to complete a five-mile or a one-mile path.

"This is a fitting way to celebrate Bill running 1,000 miles," Berry said.

Another way students have shown support is by purchasing a "See Bill Run" shirt and wearing it on Fridays. Ballenger admits wearing a red T-shirt under his suit jacket was silly, but it helped the cause.

"(This fundraiser) is really important for us as music performance and music education majors," said Jesse McConnell, a sophomore music education major from Atlanta, Ga. *"We need instruments and some instruments are unfortunately a lot, lot more expensive than others."*

The estimated cost of repairing the pipe organ was \$350,000. Receiving a challenge grant from the CH Foundation, a local group supporting the arts, the School of Music had to come up with an idea to raise a matching \$175,000.

"Especially in this economic time, we weren't quite sure how we were going to come up with this money," Berry said. *"(Ballenger) just kind of threw out the idea 'What if I ran and had people donate a dollar for every mile?'"*

The idea caught on in the School of Music and was advertised through Facebook, Twitter and even Ballenger's personal running blog.

In a YouTube video of Ballenger in the recital hall, he compared the state of the organ to being on life support.

"(The organ) is a very valuable instrument, and we need to make sure it doesn't go into disrepair," said Sigurd Øgaard, another professor of music at Tech. *"It is usable but there are portions that are disabled and little by little there are parts of the organ that have failed completely or just do not work properly."*

Øgaard teaches organ lessons at Tech after learning to play at age 10. He believes the organ could be a recruiting tool for future music majors after the completion of the renovation set to take place in May of 2012.

The organ is not only a solo instrument, but is used in orchestra, choir and band concerts, Øgaard said.

"I would have to say the notion of getting out and running longer distances (was my favorite part)," Ballenger said. *"The future of our work really matters, it matters big time."*