

Looking back, Erica Shirley is still amazed.

You might even say the New Hope Band Director was flabbergasted at the turnout for the inaugural Golden Triangle Marching Festival last September on the New Hope High campus. Between the anxiety of organizing and finalizing countless details and fine-tuning her band for its performance, Shirley wasn't sure how things would turn out or how the event would be received.

"The turnout was incredible," Shirley said. "It was very unexpected. We were super excited about the turnout and that we successfully ran a competition and we had nothing but raves about it, especially the hospitality room, and they said our band parents were so nice and it was run well."

After a successful first run, Shirley acknowledges the bar has been set pretty high for the second-annual Golden Triangle Marching Festival on Saturday, Sept. 26, on the New Hope High campus.

Shirley admits juggling numerous responsibilities was “fun” and that she, assistant band director Ryan Jobe and the rest of the New Hope Band staff relied on the hard work and dedicated work of parents, volunteers and community members to help pull off the fundraiser for the band. This year, Shirley said there is a confidence as it gets closer to the second-annual event.

“We can’t do anything less than we did the year before,” Shirley said. “The standard has been set.”

Shirley said members of the New Hope Band have developed a sense of prestige from being part of their own event. She hopes that confidence grows this year as the New Hope Band performs its entire show – “The Taiga” -- for the first time. The Taiga is the largest land biome on Earth defined by massive coniferous forests of pines, spruces and larches.

The band will hold a test run of the performance tonight (Friday, Sept. 18) at Trojan Band Night, where it will perform for parents and friends.

Jobe said the success of the initial event is a testament to the students, parents and volunteers who stepped in for the “massive” effort. He said everyone went “above and beyond” to help ensure the festival experienced only a few minor hiccups.

Jobe said it is an exciting challenge to follow the first impression with an even better second impression.

“I told our parents earlier this month that you guys did such a wonderful job at our first one that now the expectation is set, so the bar is set really high and we have to meet it,” Jobe said. “That is the thing with success, getting there is one thing but staying there is another.”

Jobe said there is a different anxiety that accompanies putting on an event of this magnitude for a second time. He said he and Shirley are

pleased with how the event has grown and that they hope things run smoothly for another fun day of music and activities.



Caledonia (1:15 p.m.) and West Lowndes (1:30 p.m.) will join Columbus and 11 other schools in the competition, while the New Hope and East Mississippi Community College bands will conclude the event with exhibition performances.

Shelby Wilbanks, the director for the Caledonia Band, said his group is fortunate to perform “out of category” due to a scheduling conflict with its school’s Homecoming Dance, sponsored by the Caledonia Band Boosters, later Saturday night. He said Jobe has been understanding and accommodating about the Caledonia Band’s conflicts, and that it has been great to work with the other directors in the festival to make the day happen for everyone.

“The Caledonia Band is excited to start their competitive season off with the Golden Triangle Regional Marching Competition again this

year," Wilbanks said. "The staff and students at New Hope ran a fantastic event last year that really provided quality feedback for our program, all while remaining local and supporting bands within our own school district."

Big Daddy's Snack Machine, Cece's Wingz & Thingz, The Flying Spoon, Krazy Kone, Trippy Reds, The Burger Boss, K-Town To Go, Jai & J's Gourmet, SnoBiz, New York Gyro and Kona Ice will provide a diverse option in food trucks. There also will be vendors set up throughout the area adjacent to the football field.

Shirley said water and Gatorade will be the only things the New Hope Band will sell. She said the food trucks and vendors paid a fee to be a part of the event and will keep their proceeds.

"Ryan and some of the student leaders already have gotten the packets ready to go, so when it is go time, it is go time," Shirley said. "We won't be stressed about anything. Our plan is to have everything done on the front end so we won't be stretched as thin as we were last year. I feel better that all of the things that need to be done are already done a week out."