



The Cascades Park amphitheater was the site of this year's Veterans Day concert hosted by Swift Creek and Lincoln. PHOTOS BY AMANDA THOMPSON

# 'Music speaks'

Young band members come together over songs at Veterans Day concert

**Amanda Karioth Thompson** Council of Culture & Arts

**A**fter witnessing the American flag flying resolutely over Fort McHenry which sustained 25 hours of continuous bombardment by the British, Francis Scott Key was inspired to put pen to paper. He composed a poem titled "Defence of Fort M'Henry" which was quickly published and set to the tune of a popular song. The year was 1814, though it wouldn't be until 1931 that a standardized version was adopted as our national anthem.

Less than 40 years later, in 1970, Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young recorded "Find The Cost of Freedom," a song composed by Stephen Stills after visiting a Civil War battle site. Both songs come from eras entirely different than our own. The world has changed dramatically and so has the way we engage in conflict, yet these songs are just as relevant now as the day they were written. They're also being performed by a new generation of emerging

**See CONCERT, Page 5C**



**The Armed Forces Medley was performed by a combined choir and band including students from Swift Creek and Lincoln.**



**Kelly Behnke, band director at Swift Creek, leads the combined bands.**

AMANDA THOMPSON

## Concert

Continued from Page 1C

musicians.

More than 200 Lincoln High School and Swift Creek Middle School students took part in a Veterans Day concert at Cascades Park and hundreds of music lovers filled the seats of the amphitheater. In the audience were veterans and their family members who were treated to patriotic standards performed by the schools' various bands and choirs.

Those ensembles were led by choral directors Scott Leaman of Lincoln and Jenilee Hallam of Swift Creek as well as band directors Daniel Rosman of Lincoln and Kelly Behnke of Swift Creek.

Swift Creek has been offering this concert to the community for the past six years. When the event outgrew its original venue two years ago, the Swift Creek organizers decided to move to Cascades Park. "We got this great idea to add in Lincoln," said Behnke. "Swift Creek is a direct feeder to Lincoln so it was an opportunity to help retention to the choral and band programs but also to have a great experience to play the music together."

Because so many of Lincoln's performers were recently Behnke's students, this concert allows her to "watch them grow and mature not only as musicians but as young men and young women as well."

She said, "as arts educators we have a very unique position that other educators don't get because we have our kids for multiple years. If you think about it, you're the one and only constant, so you're able to create relationships with these kids that other teachers sometimes don't get the opportunity to."

Those relationships are also important to the students. Currently, 12th-graders at Lincoln, both Cameron Casey and Sam Otte studied music at Swift Creek and have participated in this concert as middle school and high school students. Cameron is in the choir and one of his favorite pieces this year was "Find The Cost of Freedom," sung a cap-

ella and in three-part harmony. "When it's purely voices, it sounds so special," he said.

Cameron feels that the open and welcoming atmosphere of the venue is an important component of the event. "The great thing is that a lot of these people were just coming to walk or grab dinner and they stumbled across a great concert like this honoring veterans."

Sam plays the trumpet in Lincoln's band and she feels similarly about the location. "This venue is very public, you don't have to pay to get in, you're asked to donate at the end but you don't have to. What the concert is about is also very tied into where we are. It's for everybody."

"This is something that brings us together and something we can all agree on," Sam added. "Even if you don't agree with war, you do agree that the people who participate are sacrificing a lot. Being able to express that in a communal way is very important, especially in today's political climate where there is a lot of distance."

Sam's favorite piece to perform is the "Armed Forces Medley" which a fixture of the concert. It features the official songs of all five branches of the U.S. Armed Forces and service men and women in the audience are encouraged to stand for applause as their branch's song is played.

For Behnke, this piece holds special significance as her grandfather served in the army in World War II and her father is an air force veteran.

"It's hard to put into words, the feeling you get," admitted Behnke. "Just hearing the applause as the individuals stand up. You realize the sacrifice that they and their families made for the freedoms and privileges that we enjoy on a daily basis. It brings tears to my eyes. This concert is a way for us to convey how appreciative we are for everything that they have done for us and when words fail, music speaks."

*Amanda Karioth Thompson is the Assistant Director for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture ([www.tallahasseearts.org](http://www.tallahasseearts.org)).*