

LIFE



'The Happiest Music on Earth'

Wayland resident restores antique band organ

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SPECIAL TO THE TOWN CRIER

Wayland resident Roger Wiegand has achieved a major goal, fulfilling a dream that began in 1979. That was when he realized that he wanted to own an instrument known as a band organ, which is designed to provide loud music for rides and attractions at a fairground.

Wiegand always had an interest in music and had played the tuba in his youth, but his interest in band organs intensified when he attended the Great Dorset Steam Fair in England in 1979.

The Great Dorset Steam Fair features steam-powered machines such as tractors and locomotives, many amusement rides, and 70 band organs playing music. Since that time, Wiegand has attended dozens of fairs and organ rallies in this country and England, learning about band organs and pursuing his passion for them. In 2007, he purchased an antique band organ built for the English showman's market by the Paris firm Gavioli and Company in 1897, the year of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. Wiegand has dubbed his organ "The Diamond Jubilee."

"The Diamond Jubilee replicates a small band with bass, trombones, saxophones, flutes, piccolos, violins, percussion, clarinets and cymbals," explains Wiegand. "There are 89 keys of which 83 play notes. The music ranges from old-fashioned marches, waltzes and popular songs from the 1920s as well as classical pieces, operatic overtures and various popular show tunes. It's the happiest music on earth!"

Many band organs had elaborate displays to further attract customers. Wiegand has studied existing Gavioli cabinets to build two new side cabinets for this organ. In addition to his musical interests, Wiegand is also an experienced and talented woodworker.

Originally Wiegand's plan was to build a re-

production organ, and he discussed this with an organ builder in England for about three years. Wiegand explained, "It got to the point where I was getting frustrated with this process and then one day I saw this antique organ advertised for sale on the Internet. Of course I was on the phone within a few minutes of seeing the ad and determined that the price was within striking distance...then I got the call that the organ was mine if I wanted it. That was a Thursday, and on Saturday I was on the plane to England to go see it."

He picked up his organ builder colleague, Andrew Whitehead, at Stratford-on-Avon and they went to examine the organ. After deciding that it was in sound condition, Wiegand purchased it in April 2007 and then commissioned Andrew to restore the organ with the help of two specialty carpenters, Brian Wells and Dave Heritage.

Once the organ was restored, the next step was to arrange for a trailer to be built that would house and transport the organ, as well as function as a stage for performances. A firm in Austintown, Ohio, built the custom-designed trailer, which was ready this June. In late June, a piano moving company transferred the organ from the Wiegand's garage to the new trailer.

This winter, while Wiegand was waiting for the trailer, he commissioned Whitehead to build a glockenspiel, a percussion metal bar instrument with mallets. This spring Wiegand installed it on the front of the organ. Wiegand has also commissioned three wooden figures for the front of the organ, which are being carved in Belgium. A figure of a bandmaster will stand in the center, and two female figures will stand on either side. They should arrive soon for the summer season.

A hundred years ago, when Gavioli band organs were new, big steam engines powered them



PHOTOS BY JUDITH CANTY GRAVES

Top photo, the Diamond Jubilee band organ; below left, Roger Wiegand; and above, Wiegand, in opening, supervises the move of the main case of the organ into the new trailer at his house in Wayland.

using coal for fuel. The engines were much bigger than the organs and looked like small locomotives. At the steam fairs in England, these machines power tractors, rock crushers and threshers, as well as organs. The Diamond Jubilee now runs on electricity, and can plug into an electrical outlet or use an auxiliary generator that is kept in the trailer.

Punched cardboard books, which are folded, play the music as they pass through a device in the back of the organ called the key frame. A roller pulls the book through and a series of metal fingers poke up through the holes. As Wiegand explains, "This is a pneumatic system that runs on air pressure. The holes in the cardboard control the valves that turn the notes on and off." The music book is similar to a player piano roll.

The original English music books were destroyed years ago in a flood, but Whitehead and his wife Joan have thousands of music books in their home in England that they duplicated from the same masters that would have played this music 80 years ago. Wiegand was able to obtain copies from them.

Wiegand is now a "showman" or "Gavioli

man," the person who operates the organ. As he says, "I'm interested in taking the organ out and playing it for anyone who wants to hear it. This could be done at fairs, festivals, conventions or business events. The uses are the same as they were 100 years ago. If you want to attract people to your event, this is an attention-getter."

Wiegand and his wife, Jean Milburn, are planning to tour with the organ and operate it at fairs throughout Massachusetts and other states.

After years of dreaming about and studying band organs, Roger Wiegand is beginning to make that dream a reality. His Diamond Jubilee is the largest touring antique organ in the United States. With great satisfaction, Wiegand says, "It sounds just as beautiful as the day it came out of the Gavioli workshop in Paris."

The local debut of the Gavioli Diamond Jubilee will be a free concert at the Wayland Town Beach on Sunday, Aug. 3, at 3 p.m. The rain date is Sunday, Aug. 10. For more information about the organ, go to www.carouselorgan.com.

