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ENTERTAINMENT

SOMETHING TO SHARE? Carol Guild, editor
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New Auburn Winds conductor readies for first concert

Matthew Morse will conduct the Auburn Winds fall concert "Something for Everyone" on Sunday in Auburn.

COURTESY PHOTOS

Free concert Sunday in Auburn features Iraq veteran conductor

BY GUS THOMSON
OF THE AUBURN JOURNAL

The Auburn Winds will be under the baton of new conductor Matthew Morse for the first time in concert Sunday.

When the 40-member band takes the stage in Auburn, they'll be led by a 25-year U.S. Army veteran with wartime experience in Iraq, service at West Point and a love of music that stretches back to his childhood.

Morse succeeds Brian O'Donnell – who is joining the U.S. Air Force to further his conducting career.

In Iraq in 2003 and 2004, Morse commanded the 1st Armored Division band, providing morale-boosting music to battle-hardened soldiers.

"We would be going into places where folks don't have a lot – their job was to essentially be shot at," Morse said. "It was gratifying to see someone gazing off into space and then seeing them connect with the music and let it take them to another place."

Morse lived in a tent for a year and, while not directly shot at, was under fire from rocket at-

tacks that injured other soldiers. He learned first-hand how close even Army musicians can come to war when a French horn player with the Armored Division band was first on scene at one bombed tent and provided initial medical attention to a wounded soldier.

Morse was bitten by the band bug while growing up in Bloomington, Minn. and watching the high school marching band as an elementary school student.

At the community's Jefferson High School, Morse began to see the military as an option, particularly after a performance at the school by the Air Force's Airmen of Note.

"I enlisted soon after high school and ended up enjoying what I was doing for 25 years in the Army," Morse said. His Army career also included serving as associate conductor of the West Point U.S. Military Academy band.

Morse has since earned a doctorate in conducting from the University of North Texas and works as an assistant professor of music at Sacramento

State University.

Morse will lead the band at its first formal concert of the 2017-18 season at 3 p.m. Sunday in the Auburn State Theatre, 985 Lincoln Way, in Auburn.

Auburn Winds secretary Vince Warm, who plays tenor saxophone, said the band is lucky to have Morse as its new conductor.

"Morse is an experience conductor, euphonium and bass trombone player who served many years as an Army bandmaster," Warm said. "We're excited to see where he will lead us in the future."

That leadership was forged over a 25-year career that started with a foundation as one of the band players before rising to bandmaster.

"You can't learn to lead unless you learn how to follow," Morse said. "It's a must for any conductor and most come from the player ranks."

The bottom line Sunday will be a performance reflecting a passion for music in war and peace.

"We're enjoying making music together and having a good



Above, Matthew Morse conducts during a 2009 ceremony as associate bandmaster of the West Point Band at the U.S. Military Academy.

Right, Morse leads the 1st Armored Division Band in a 2003 ceremony at the Baghdad International Airport.



time while we do so," Morse said.

The free concert will include selections from Leonard Bernstein's "West Side Story," Ralph

Vaughan Williams' "English Folk Song Suite," and George Gershwin's "Strike Up The Band."