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PSU band pride, numbers grow

Most Pittsburg State University students are just finding their way around campus today, but there is one group of students who have been hard at work for the past week. Members of the Pride of the Plains Marching Band began practicing on Aug. 17. With a home football game on the first Thursday of the semester, the learning curve has been steep.

Director Doug Whitten said the band has 150 members this year, which continues a growth spurt that has seen the band nearly quadruple in size over the past five years.

Craig Fuchs, chairman of the music department at PSU, came to the university in 1998 to direct the band. He said when he interviewed, the band had shrunk to just 41 students. Those were not the brightest days for the band, Fuchs said.

“There was very little pride or enthusiasm in the students,” Fuchs recalled, “and it simply was not a very exciting place to be.”

Whitten, who took over the band in 2003 when Fuchs was named department chairman, gives credit to his boss for turning around the program.

“The key is an energetic and well respected band director,” Whitten said. “Craig Fuchs is the simple answer. His students are very loyal to him.”

Fuchs said things began to change on the first day of band camp that first semester.

“I was energized and excited about my new role, he said. “We had a lot of new faces. There were a lot of students who were ready for a change and ready to work harder. Positive attitudes go along way to achieving success. Those who could handle the change simply made their way out of the program over the course of the year.”

Whitten said the pride and enthusiasm in the band today is palpable.

“It is great to be part of something special,” Whitten said. “In band at Pitt State, we really try to develop a sense of family.”

Additionally, Whitten said, the band continues to attract more students because of its quality.

“The band is good,” Whitten said. “If the band didn't play well, student s would not be having fun. Our quality attracts students and helps keep them interested.”

Fuchs said it may be hard for persons who have not been part of a band to understand how much band members love being part of the Pride of the Plains Marching Band.

“There is just this collaborative friendship, trust, and sense of belonging that occurs when you are in a group like this, all working to achieve a common goal,” Fuchs said.

Whitten and Fuchs said that having a high quality band program is important for the university for a variety of reasons.

“Marching band is very visible in the community,” Whitten said. “People will judge a school by its band and sports teams.”

He said the band not only helps promote school spirit at sporting events, but also is a positive activity that has academic benefits for students.

“For the students, the band is something positive to be involved in,” Whitten said. “Students who are involved in active student groups like band, choir and sports tend to graduate at a higher rate than those who simply attend classes. Later down the road of life, students who were active during college are more likely to be donors to the university.”

Whitten said that PSU football fans will notice more than just the growing size of the band this fall. There will also be more variety in the halftime programs. While learning completely different halftime routines for each game is more work, Whitten said, it is more fun for the students as well as the fans.

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