

Marching Band debate heats up Trail meeting

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By Ben Freda Abington Journal Correspondent

The Lackawanna Trail school board agreed to appoint Kevin Dikeman marching band director at a stipend of \$3,252 as stipulated in the collective bargaining agreement during the March 10 meeting.

When president Mark Lombardi asked if anyone had any questions or comments, student Kevin Thorne shared his thoughts.

"Some of the band (members) quit because there was no competition band," he said.

Lombardi asked Thorne if he's aware of any meets where bands compete.

"I heard about a Cavalcade band, which to me the way I define, is a type of marching band. Are you familiar with that?" Lombardi asked Thorne.

Thorne said Cavalcade is a type of competitive band, but it's a different way of competing.

Marching band student, Kelsey Hopkins, expressed her concerns with the change of marching band director because she fears students might not compete in the Tournament of Bands (TOB).

"The Marching Lions have been competing for the past 32 years, and I have been personally a part of it for the past 10 years," she said. "And I'm planning on going into the music education field, which means I need the experience for it. And not competing for the Marching Lions is like telling a football team that they can't go to football games."

Hopkins said competitive marching band teaches students responsibility and teamwork.

"I believe that all students should be granted the opportunity to have the experience that I have," she said.

Hopkins presented letters from current students and alumni expressing their concerns. Lombardi asked her what's the difference between Cavalcade and TOB.

Hopkins explained Cavalcade is more expensive and that its judges praise everyone who compete whether they're good or bad. She said TOB is more hardcore and its competitors are trying to be the best on the east coast.

Missy Bower, a teacher's assistant at the elementary center and mother of the former marching band director, said she researched both Cavalcade's web site and TOB's web site. TOB's membership is \$100 per year, and Cavalcade is \$275 per year. She said both Cavalcade and TOB have competitors in the Philadelphia area, but TOB competes in the Pocono area as well. Bower said Trail's marching band has competed in a home competition at Trail's high school for the last 10 years.

"It is a fundraiser for our marching band organization that raises several thousands of dollars," she said.

Bower said she doesn't know if Philadelphia high school marching bands will travel to Lackawanna Trail for a marching band competition; therefore, Lackawanna Trail would lose a fundraising venue.

"We just spent several thousand dollars on brand new uniforms for these kids," she said. "They should have these uniforms on a field of competition on a highly competitive level. TOB is a rigorous program. These kids rise to that challenge. They deserve that opportunity."

Bower said Friends of Music can't afford to take the students to Cavalcade.

"I would like to ask the board to table this motion," she said. "Talk to your candidate again. See if he (Dikeman) is willing to put in the time and effort to keep these kids competing at a TOB level."

Jackie Mattes, president of Friends of Music, said last year's competition didn't make any money.

Cathy Rist Strauch, treasurer of Friends of Music, said the reason the competition didn't make any money is because the money went to all of the marching band trips.

"None of it (money) stayed in the band itself to pay for things," she said. "Normally, we might make about \$1,000 to \$2,000."

Murphy reminded the board and the community that the actual topic is about who he and principal John Rushefski chose as marching band director..

"We believe adamantly that he (Dikeman) is a certified and qualified music teacher," he said. "This is not a vote for competition band, non-competition band, or Tournament of Bands, or Cavalcade. This is a vote to put the most qualified person in that position, so that he or she can make that determination."

Murphy said he will give Dikeman the time, energy, and support to determine what competition the marching should be in.