

Trail, Keystone boast burgeoning bands

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STAFF PHOTO/ROBERT BAKER The Lackawanna Trail marching band performs during Saturday's Christy Mathewson Day parade in Factoryville.



STAFF PHOTO/ROBERT BAKER Color guard Wynn-Phillips leads the color guard.



STAFF PHOTO/ROBERT BAKER The Keystone College Jazz Ensemble, one of Keystone's several new bands, performs at the joint municipal soccer park following the Christy Mathewson Day parade.

Musical bands are an excellent example of how strong individual pieces can often come together and form a stronger collective, and for two local bands at Lackawanna Trail and Keystone College, some of those individual pieces are rather unconventional.

Trail's band is unique in the sense that their senior band includes seventh graders, which makes for a young, but nonetheless talented small core of musicians.

Similarly, Keystone's musical ensembles, which are in only their second year of existence, are comprised of a mix of Keystone students, community members, and a select crop of local high school talent.

Both bands were busy this past weekend, as Trail's marching band and the Keystone College Jazz Band both performed at Factoryville's Christy Mathewson Day festivities.

The Christy Mathewson Day parade was the only parade performance for Trail's young marching band this year, who will also perform at every Lions football game, as well as a marching band competition at Pittston on Oct. 10, and Wyoming Area on Oct. 24.

Just like the football team they play for, the Trail marching band is rebuilding, with 13 new members across all grade levels.

"We have four incredible leaders in our seniors," said Trail's band director Kevin Dikeman. "They know their roles and they embrace them, and that really helps the younger kids musically."

Two of these seniors are Wynn Phillips, who heads the color guard, and Eric Holmes, who plays the tenor sax.

"I love working with the younger kids," said Phillips. "Color guard is a specialized skill, so even though we have many varying age groups everyone starts out the same. From there it is awesome to see everyone improve together."

Holmes also had high praise for his band-mates, saying "it isn't really that different working with younger members because they follow instruction really well."

"When we have a perfect sound, or run through a perfect set, you wouldn't even know some of them are seventh graders," Holmes continued.

Moving forward, Dikeman said that the band still needs to work on their "musicality," but also that they are improving every week.

"There's a difference between playing a note and playing a note with emotion," Dikeman said. "We need to work on this some, but we're getting better."

The 31 members of Trail's marching band will be performing a field show themed after "Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory" this year.

Despite their small size, Trail produces some quality musicians, and, coincidentally, one such musical alumni from Trail has been instrumental in starting the music program a few miles down the road at Keystone College.

Jeff Tylutki, who graduated from Trail, envisioned both large and small music ensembles at Keystone that differed from conventional college bands insofar as one did not have to be a music major to participate.

When Tylutki came to Keystone there were no bands, but that changed just over a year ago when he, along with the help of numerous students and volunteers, organized the music program at the institution from scratch. Since that time about 75 people, from the college, community, and local high schools, have helped build the Keystone music program into an ensemble that routinely packs their auditorium.

"I wanted to give people who love music, but who aren't necessarily pursuing music as a career, the opportunity to play after high school," Tylutki said.

"We operate under 'student life,' so there isn't auditioning and members aren't competing against other music majors," he continued. "We still work really hard though, and we sound great."

Starting the program wasn't easy, as Tylutki and others put a great deal of effort into tracking down instruments and arranging the initial practices.

"I remember driving to Philadelphia because someone there was willing to donate a trumpet," he laughed. "It really is amazing to see how far we have come in a year's time."

Tylutki said that the strength of his young program lies in the participant's camaraderie and their retention.

"Everyone is very close and they love to play together, even after they graduate in some cases," he said.

In the program's first year of existence Keystone graduated 12 of its members, but 7 of those alumni are still a part of the band.

Keystone's music program is free to join, and Keystone College students even receive free weekly lessons on their primary instrument.

Making up the young music program are the Keystone College Symphonic Band, Jazz Ensemble, Jazz Combo, Chamber Ensemble, and Jazz Ensemble.

"Our primary goal is to contribute to the College and to the community in a positive way," Tylutki concluded. "We couldn't be happier to be a part of Keystone College."