

Summer 2014

And the Beat Goes On

Edward J. Lordan

West Chester University of Pennsylvania, elordan@wcupa.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.wcupa.edu/comstudies_facpub



Part of the [Music Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Lordan, E. J. (2014). And the Beat Goes On. *West Chester University Magazine*, 5-5. Retrieved from http://digitalcommons.wcupa.edu/comstudies_facpub/4

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Communication Studies at Digital Commons @ West Chester University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Communication Studies Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ West Chester University. For more information, please contact wccressler@wcupa.edu.



AND THE BEAT GOES ON

(L to r): Henry Pearlberg, Jack Hontz, Jeff Shaull, Joanne Haley, John Shankweiler, Kara Suarez, James McLaughlin, Steve Fischer and Aubree Pacifico Windish.

When the Strath Haven High School marching band rolls up to a football game, they can be as overpowering as the team itself.

Thirteen, count 'em, thirteen buses unload 415 boisterous kids and their sousaphones, flags, pompoms and drum kits - the biggest, rowdiest high school marching band in Pennsylvania. They're 35 percent of the high school student body in a K-thru-12 program where more than half of the students are involved in music programs, and none of it would be possible without the music department at West Chester University.

The story begins three decades and change ago, with Jack Hontz and Henry Pearlberg, a pair of WCU music majors who lived in Tyson Hall and marched in the University's band. Like their fathers, who also graduated from WCU, the friends planned to pursue music education careers, and when they graduated in '82, they landed one-year teaching contracts in separate schools.

The following year, Hontz was recruited by the Wallingford-Swarthmore school district in Delaware County, PA., to develop a marching band. He accepted with the condition that the school hire a music director for the middle school as well. Not surprisingly, Hontz had a candidate in mind - his old buddy, Henry Pearlberg.

When the WCU duo arrived at their new positions, there was, Hontz recalls diplomatically, "plenty of room for growth." The music

program consisted of a dozen students in a concert band. "We started knocking on doors and making phone calls," Hontz recalls, "Anybody who mentioned the word 'band', we tried to sell them on joining us. Our first meeting, four students showed up. By the start of the season, we had thirty-five involved."

Hontz and Pearlberg didn't just recruit musicians, they kept working their WCU connection as well. In 1984, the school district opened the new Strath Haven High School, and soon after, another WCU grad, John Shankweiler, joined the district as vocal director. Since then, six more WCU alumni have come on board: Steve Fischer, Aubree Pacifico Windish, James McLaughlin, Jeff Shaull, Kara Suarez and Joanne Haley, who earned her music education certification from the university.

A music staff populated by Golden Rams is no surprise to Hontz. "West Chester University was a tremendous opportunity for all of us," he explains. "The music program provided us with an excellent education, and we've all stayed in touch with our professors there."

Hontz lives in the borough and his son Jack - a music major - attends the University. They attend concert performances and football games on the campus on a regular basis.

Pearlberg stresses the same themes. "The band and the program were perfect for me and I know so many people who blossomed at West Chester," he recalls. "I got a great educa-

tion there and I've stayed in touch with the program."

Both men stress the team effort needed to make their music program such a success. "We begin encouraging students to join in on the first day they are connected with the school district," Pearlberg says. "Every level is designed to encourage continued involvement at the next level." Hontz cites supportive administrators, enthusiastic students, and a community that promotes arts education as essential ingredients to the district's musical accomplishments. "All of the people in our program work together, which is not something you see at every school district," he says. "There are an amazing number of people whose efforts make this possible."

Every school year at Strath Haven, the cycle repeats itself as all of the pieces of the musical puzzle come together. The jazz band tweaks their solos before the big show, and the choral ensemble blends the traditional with the trendy. At the football game, the brass section fires up the crowd with "Seven Nation Army" and the flag team kicks up their heels in a long line of school colors. When the seniors move on, they look back fondly at the teachers who encouraged their love of music. Meanwhile, their teachers look back at their years at WCU, thinking the same thing.

Ed Lordan, Professor of Communication Studies