

Calvert Hall's champions include marching band

TOWSON – While many of their peers enjoyed an extended summer, members of the Calvert Hall College High School marching band honed their craft in the heat.

July included Wednesday night practices – with the exception of the Fourth of July, when they marched in the Dundalk and Towson parades. Daylong band camp began Aug. 7.

The Cardinals' full marching band numbers nearly 150 students. From them, approximately 60 perform as a competitive group five or six times over the autumn and winter.

"Competitive marching band is our fall sport," said Brian Ecton, director of instrumental music. "If guys want to do it, they're expected to do it well and commit themselves to it."

The effort pays off, as Calvert Hall has been recognized as a national champion from USBands and the grand champion of the 2016 Allstate Sugar Bowl in New Orleans.

"They're not remembering that Christmas concert they did as a junior and the spring concert they did as a freshman," Ecton said of the commitment. "They're remembering that time they won the national championship or the Maryland State Title. Those are the things that stay with you."

Forming Men

While Calvert Hall's music program includes 13 performing ensembles, five levels of music theory and as many as six electives, Ecton lets freshman parents know that forming musicians is not his top priority.

"My main objective is not for their son to be the best musician. It's to make sure that when they graduate, they are an incredible man," Ecton said. "Music and band is the vehicle to help make them great people."

In the fall, the competitive marching band practices Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, 3:30-5:30 p.m. Despite the demands, Ecton said, members are high academic achievers.

Drum Major

Entering his junior year and first year as drum major, Riley Cox will keep time and help others with their music and field placements as he conducts both the competitive and noncompetitive marching bands.

“It’s great to help kids develop themselves, especially when it comes to something as intense as this,” he said.

A trumpeter since fourth grade, Cox said that marching band is a complex extracurricular endeavor, mixing athleticism and music. August practice included 100-degree heat, sometimes in long-sleeved shirts and pants, with some carrying tubas and bass drums.

“I’ve played other sports before, but this is one of the more intense ones,” said Cox, who is on the school’s rugby team. “There’s a lot more thinking that you have to put into it.”

Behind the Scenes

The schedule for the 2018-19 year includes a trip to perform at Disney World, a Calvert Hall rite of passage done once every four years, with a smaller trip, in recent years a college football bowl game, in between.

Funding a premier marching band includes an annual Car and Craft Show (Oct. 13), a spring Jazz Dinner and smaller fundraisers.

Ecton estimates that 70 percent of all costs are out-of-pocket for families. For parents, road trips mean long days, getting instruments on and off the field, and preparing lunches and snack bags.

Why do all that?

“It’s changed my child,” said Heather Sozio, leader of the band parents and mother of James, a junior saxophonist. “He has a purpose. It keeps him more focused in school when he has band.”

Color Guard

Seven of the eight color guard members are female students mostly from Maryvale Preparatory School in Lutherville, Mercy High School in Baltimore and Notre Dame Preparatory in Towson. Some learned about the group from Calvert Hall brothers, and others from school organizations.

“All of us are still learning,” said Charlotte Lynch, a junior at Notre Dame Prep. “You can always take it to another level.”

Calvert Hall junior Joseph McHugh used to march in the band, but switched to color guard when he wanted a new challenge. Many of the color guard have backgrounds in dance, cheerleading, gymnastics and martial arts.

The Show

The band performs the same show during a competitive season, making adjustments as needed.

“We refer to this as the marching arts,” Ecton said. “It’s theatrics, it’s just taking place on the football field.”

He formerly wrote both the music and the drill for the show. Now, due to time restraints, he purchases the music. A show consists of 80-100 pages of drill direction, each taking an hour to write. A computer program aids the process, which allows Ecton to incorporate students’ individual abilities.

“We’ll have some up years and some down years, talentwise,” Ecton said, noting that the class of 2018 was one of the best. “You get really worried about it ... and then you have a freshman class that we just welcomed. Top to bottom it’s the most talented group that we’ve seen.

“In a couple years we’re going to be perfectly fine.”

Email Emily Rosenthal at erosenthal@CatholicReview.org