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### ***Brussels Community Band***

# Adult, youth partner to meet community's need

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A fixture at most high school varsity sporting events back in the U.S. is the local high school band.

Depending upon school size, either the full school band or its smaller "pep" band component plays inspirational "fight" music to spur on the home team and its supporters and keep fans entertained during game breaks.

For that matter, this is not an uncommon feature of life at the athletic events of many of the larger Department of Defense Dependent Schools in Europe.

The Brussels American School (BAS) is definitely not one of the "larger" schools in the DoDDS-Europe system.

With a total kindergarten - 12 grade population of a little over 300, the school's small population base can easily be stretched. This is particularly the case with high school varsity athletics (close to 80 percent of BAS high schoolers participate in varsity sports).

Because high school students have finite amounts of discretionary time available, competing programs (such as those involving music) can suffer.

"The most experienced musicians in any K-12 school will always be the high school students," says BAS Music Teacher and Band Director, Scott Rumery. "But in a small school with such a high level of varsity sports participation, a band director finds his most experienced musicians stripped away."

Thus was born the Brussels Community Band.

Rumery (whose own musician daughter, Anika, is herself a varsity athlete) explains: "The band was founded in 1997 after several families came to me with a request to field a viable "pep" band to play at BAS home football games. This was a tall order, since the demographic problem I've just described was as much a reality back then as it is today."

Rumery had no lack of enthusiastic-but inexperienced - BAS middle school students to draw from.

"Since I needed a core of 'experienced' musicians, and I wanted to ensure a high level of musicianship, my only choice was to go out into the adult Brussels community. It was a measure born of necessity."

Judging by the fact that the Brussels Community Band is still going strong nine years later, it was also an inspired choice.

Four adults were recruited in 1997 to form the band cadre, and, along with three students, formed the nucleus of the original pep band.

"The idea really took off and started



PHOTO: Thad Moysesowicz

Brussels Community Band Director Scott Rumery (right foreground) and the band's "Pep Combo" plays during the recent Brussels-Menwith Hill football game. Support Brussels American School and other community functions for the past nine years, the band is made up of adult and student members.

to become self-sustaining," says Rumery. "The more we played and the more we were seen, the more musicians - adults and kids - signed up to join us."

Before long, the growing band was playing at BAS home basketball games as well as at community events. It also grew sufficiently to be able to offer concerts, and not just pep-type music.

"Our biggest gigs to date," says Rumery, "were back in summer of 2001, during President (George W.) Bush's first visit to Europe, when we played for then-Secretary of State (Colin) Powell, and, later, for President Bush." He laughs, "The president himself took the baton for a few bars - so he has the distinction of being one of only three or four conductors in the history of the Brussels Community Band!"

The secret to the band's success, according to Rumery, lies precisely in its being a mixture of youth and adults.

"The kids are all great, but mostly inexperienced, musicians. They're really enthusiastic," he says. "The adults have all had musical experience through to the high school level, but, in most cases, they start out as pretty "stale" musically, having to really dig back into memory."

Flutist (and Air Force Major) Tracy Gray, assigned to the NATO International Military Staff (IMS), agrees that it's a great symbiotic relationship.

Gray, the band's current president, has been a band member for two years. "I was recruited by Col. (William F.) Burnette, a former IMS member," she says. "I'm pretty typical of the adult profile you'll find in the band. When Col. Burnette approached me, I'd last played a flute 20 years earlier." Gray says she joined, "Because music was a really positive part of my own youth experience, and I thought this might be a way to 'give back' to today's kids."

Samantha Stockley, a U.S. civilian also assigned to the IMS, seconds Gray's feelings.

"I played the flute in high school and a bit in college, and then hung it up. Years later, I'm re-living my childhood, thanks to the Brussels Community Band!" Stockley particularly enjoys "competing" with the band's youngsters. "They really make me work," she laughs. "Their smaller fingers make them more agile, plus, the kids can usually hold a note longer!"

Most of all, Stockley says she enjoys the camaraderie and relaxing atmosphere of a group dedicated to making music.

Saxophonist (and BAS seventh-grader) Dakota Deverill was a recent "walk-on."

"My older brother is on the football team, and I figured this was a neat way to both play my instrument and support him." Deverill says he's felt very warmly welcomed. "Mr. Rumery really

treats all of us, kids and adults, alike. I really enjoy that."

The band has an ambitious schedule. Besides providing a "pep" band component for forthcoming BAS home games, it's recently formed an "out-reach" partnership with the local Belgian town band in Kortenberg.

"It's been great," says Rumery. "We recently held a rehearsal together, and are looking forward to performing a joint concert on Nov. 25th. And we're looking forward to each band occasionally augmenting the other."

One of the challenges facing Rumery is the constant fluctuation in membership.

"This is inevitable in a volunteer activity such as ours. Many of our members hold down quite important 'day' jobs, and the call of duty takes them away from rehearsals and even weekend gigs," he says. "Our kids have to juggle the band with homework and other school commitments. But we seem to somehow always manage, while turning out good quality music."

Rumery and Gray are always looking for new talent.

Says Rumery, "The only qualification required is one year's prior experience on an instrument - no matter how long ago."

Gray adds, "And we have instruments, so you can't use the excuse that your instrument is hanging in your parents' attic back home in the States!"