

# The band is back

Resurrected by top-level area musicians

by jenniferkneuss

**W**hen the very first First Town Days parade stepped off 32 years ago, it was proudly led by an elaborate, gold adorned red wagon carrying the Elks Chapter 510 Band. The wagon's former purpose had been to carry a searchlight during World War II, in the early 1940s. In 1960, Dr. Russell and Aaron Funk, a local businessman, purchased the wagon to carry the Elks Band, of which both were members.

Cheryl Graham, a longtime local music educator and band director herself, has recently taken on the role of resurrecting the Elks band to its former glory. "In 2007, the New Philadelphia Vocal Majority Choir wasn't using the wagon anymore, and the First Town Days committee was talking about wanting to add more bands to the parade. It's difficult since so many high school bands aren't in session in early July. The committee also wanted something special for the 30th year parade that year, too," explained Graham, of the idea to utilize the wagon to once again carry a band. "When they built the new Elks building, band members Bob Dombeck and Bob Gibbs brought all of the original music to me. So that's what we played. They all enjoyed it so much."

Last year, Graham was busy directing a special collaboration of the New

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Local musicians rode in a classic World War II era bandwagon, once used by the Elks Chapter 510 Band, during the First Town Days Parade.

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Philadelphia High School band and former alumni, so she was not able to repeat the 30th year appearance. However, the wagon was used to carry those alumni who were unable to march for the length of the parade. The idea to use the wagon carried on, and this year the band played once again.

There were about 30 members playing, including a combination of area music teachers, musicians, and former band students from Claymont, Dover, New Philadelphia, and Sandy Valley schools. "Two or three of the older gentlemen came in and picked their favorites, and that's how we got our first repertoire," said Graham. "They played King Cotton, Our Director, High School Cadets, God Bless America, and Way Down Yonder in New Orleans, all music from the original Elks Band library."

Graham said that the band had very little rehearsal time. "We practiced two weeks before the parade for one night, then we practiced on the float, in

my driveway, the Wednesday before the parade. The neighbors loved it. They brought their lawn chairs, and even brought their grandchildren over. It just shows you what great musicians they are."

During the parade, their professionalism continued to show. "They played all but eight minutes of the entire parade. The older ones just kept it going," exclaimed Graham.

She also noted that she received additional help to get the wagon ready and to have it in the parade.

"Some of the alumni helped me wash it, clean it up, and touch up the paint, that sort of thing. And New Philadelphia High School custodians Chris Born and Jim Fabiano volunteered to get it out of storage, bring it to my house, and pull it during the parade," she added.

Graham said this won't be the last that the community hears from the band. "Next year, we're going to play another set of music from the Elks," she said. "We talked about it, and they really want to do it again, so I'll be there."