

WHY VOLUNTEER?



So your student has joined the band? Congratulations, and welcome to the band family! Volunteering and being involved in your student's band activities is so important. Below are some testimonials from alumni band parents on how they got involved, and why it was such a valuable experience.

The band has a lot of needs to be filled—there is something to fit everyone's situation.

I have enjoyed my time as a band parent immensely. I have had tears through each of the events this year, knowing it was my final time being part of this fabulous organization. When I was the parent of a freshman, I was overwhelmed by the volunteer obligations that I saw during the initial marching band meetings. I didn't know how it would all fit into my schedule—I had just moved here, and was looking for a full-time teaching position, as well as being a mother and parent of a hockey player.

Freshman year, I admit, I did the minimum at the start. I went a little early to my daughter's band rehearsal pick up times to hear the final run through and understood what she was involved with. I was captivated. This period of unemployment allowed me to actually see what was going on at band rehearsal. I was amazed!

During that freshman September, I received an email asking for people to come and help paint the stage they were building. I decided that I had to go and volunteer since I was still not working. I went to the home of Jan and Tom S. and witnessed how much they were doing for my daughter's marching band. Their entire garage and half of their driveway was filled with stage production! Tom and Jan were each giving so much of themselves to make my daughter's band experience happen. I enjoyed my time with them, being part of prepping the set and getting to know what my kid was actually doing as a marching band member. The first year as a band parent hooked me in a way I never could have imagined.

At the end of the year, I knew I had to find a position on the band boosters board to give back to all the people who have given so much to create this awesome experience for my child. I signed up for the volunteer coordinator position and held it for three years. It was a perfect fit for me! I felt like I was giving back what I could while simultaneously working around my schedule and feeling connected with my daughter's band.

You will make life long friends.

In the May meeting prior to my daughter starting high school, I was overwhelmed by all the information that was shared: however, I also quickly realized that she had joined much more than a class or activity. I had a busy work and personal life and didn't feel I had time for the band's volunteering expectations, but I heard the message that I was expected to do my part, so I looked for something small I could maybe fit in.

In the summer I nervously signed up for concessions duty at the first available football game. That year the home game was held at Marquette, as Lafayette's field was being re-turfed. We were crowded into a tiny borrowed space. The volunteers running concessions were rookies too, and it was a really hot night! It was a chaotic and exhausting few hours as we sold hundreds of bottles of cold drinks to thankful, waiting, endless crowds, all while sweating and laughing at the sheer pace and craziness of it all. But here is the strange thing—it was surprisingly fun. And the people I worked with that night—including those who have long since graduated—immediately became good friends I keep in regular contact with still today.

From that night I was hooked. During our four years I happily volunteered for board positions, event chair positions, game nights, making props, and helping at competitions. (Sidenote: it is such a different perspective to see the show from on the field! Do it at least once!) I did it all because I knew I was supporting my daughter's hard work and that of her teachers and friends, and I could see how much work needed to be done. But I gained so much from it personally: I learned new skills; was in touch with everything going on (there's a lot!); witnessed the hard work and creativity of so many people; and was often there to really see my daughter and her friends blossom in this environment. The band directors expect a lot of our kids—not just on their music or marching, but on being role models, leaders and ambassadors. To some extent, seeing the parents pitch in and be involved was equally a part of that lesson for them.

Most of all, I did it because I really enjoyed being around so many fun people working towards common goals. I know it's not just me. I learned quickly that many alumni parents have remained friends years after their kids moved on from band. A surprising number would tell me at events that they used to be active in the boosters five, 10 or even 15 years ago and they remember it all very fondly. If I have one piece of advice for incoming parents, it's 'get involved'. Even just a little. You won't regret it!

You'll gain new respect for the huge efforts that go into band.

We had to convince our child to "try band for a year". She was hooked by mid-July after a week of band camp before high school had even begun. Why? It's HARD WORK, it's HOT, it is physical and it involves a lot of new learning that first year especially. But the rewards keep coming back ten-fold. The teamwork that is developed between individual sections and the band as a whole and the REWARD for pulling together so many bits and pieces to make an incredible show are unexplainable until you've experienced it. These kids have so much respect for the staff and for each other because they are ALL working unbelievable hard to achieve the same goal.

Likewise, the parents who are involved gain a whole new respect for the hours and hours of time and the huge effort our kids (and the band staff) are putting in to this one eight minute show!!! Any time you help, you are surrounded by fun parents who are all ready to do their part to support ALL our kids. There are so many different ways parents can be involved that can work with your schedule or if you have younger kids. After trying a few different volunteer jobs, some people find their niche and stick with that for four years! Other parents like to volunteer across the board in a variety of ways.

We won't tell you it isn't a crazy, insanely busy time during marching band season....it is! But you'll reach that last competition and be so sad that it's all over. And suddenly freshman year turns into senior year and you just keep wanting more! The kids always relate to their "band family". It's so true, during a marching season, sometimes your child sees the band kids and teachers way more than they see you on a busy weekend with a game and a competition. So, join the fun. Sign up, hang out, help out! You'll see why your child is so dedicated. You don't want to miss the "behind the scenes" action! When you're involved, you get the same chills and emotions that the kids experience when they turn in a stellar performance. Parents are a part of the "band family" too. It has been an incredible four years.

Band Boosters and how I was talked into one of my best high school experiences.

When my son announced at the end of 8th grade that he was joining marching band in high school, I figured that it would be "his thing" and we would watch him march at the Friday night games. See, I knew nothing about marching band. Shortly after he committed to marching, a good friend who had a senior in the Regiment, and who was also the band booster chairperson, approached me. They were looking for next years band booster co-chair. I was like a deer in headlights knowing very little as an incoming freshman parent. How could I possibly be effective?

I met the person who would be the incoming chairperson and was told he would do most of the heavy lifting my freshman year (he did) to prepare me for my sophomore year when I would move up to chairperson. Freshman year, starting with that first meeting in May, was a blur but I learned quickly that this was a group of students, directors, and parents who worked hard to make the band program a success. I learned that if you are on time, you are late. I learned that the directors expect the most from the students and give the most to the students. I learned that everyone pitches in and everyone wants to help. I learned what COC and Marketplace meant. It was all foreign to me, but everyone worked together to help everyone to succeed.

By sophomore year I was comfortable as chairperson (not so much speaking in front of everybody at the May meeting!) and enjoyed all the camaraderie among the parents and students. Throughout these four years, I have met some of the most creative, smart and dedicated people. I have been on road trips, been to band contests, helped move props onto the fields, assisted in building props and stood behind props to keep them upright in a strong wind, alongside other parents who have become good friends. By going to the monthly booster meetings, I learned things from the other parents, and Mr. Balog. While he attends every meeting, and always shared information via meeting minutes, it was nice to hear from him and get his impressions in real time. I realized that the parents who become involved with the band boosters also become more engaged with their student's experience with the band. This involvement is unobtrusive to the student while still being right there in the middle of the action. My son has grown as a person and as a musician. His involvement taught him focus, leadership, and respect, and I got to see this all happen in real time due to my participation in the Lafayette Band Boosters. Get involved. Start slowly or jump in as I did. You will not regret it, and you will gain so much from it.