

# Bands: A Catholic School Tradition

By BILL DEVLIN

Most likely the following is one of those stories that everyone has heard with only the names of the people and places changed. This particular version concerns a man whose son attended Penn State. As New Year's Day approached, a day renowned for its abundance of football bowl games, the man boasted to his friends at work that his son would be playing for Penn State in the Orange Bowl.

Planning to watch the Orange Bowl on television, a fellow worker asked the proud father what his son would be playing, an obvious reference to a particular position on offense or defense.

"He'll be playing the clarinet," the father beamed. "You can watch him at half-time."

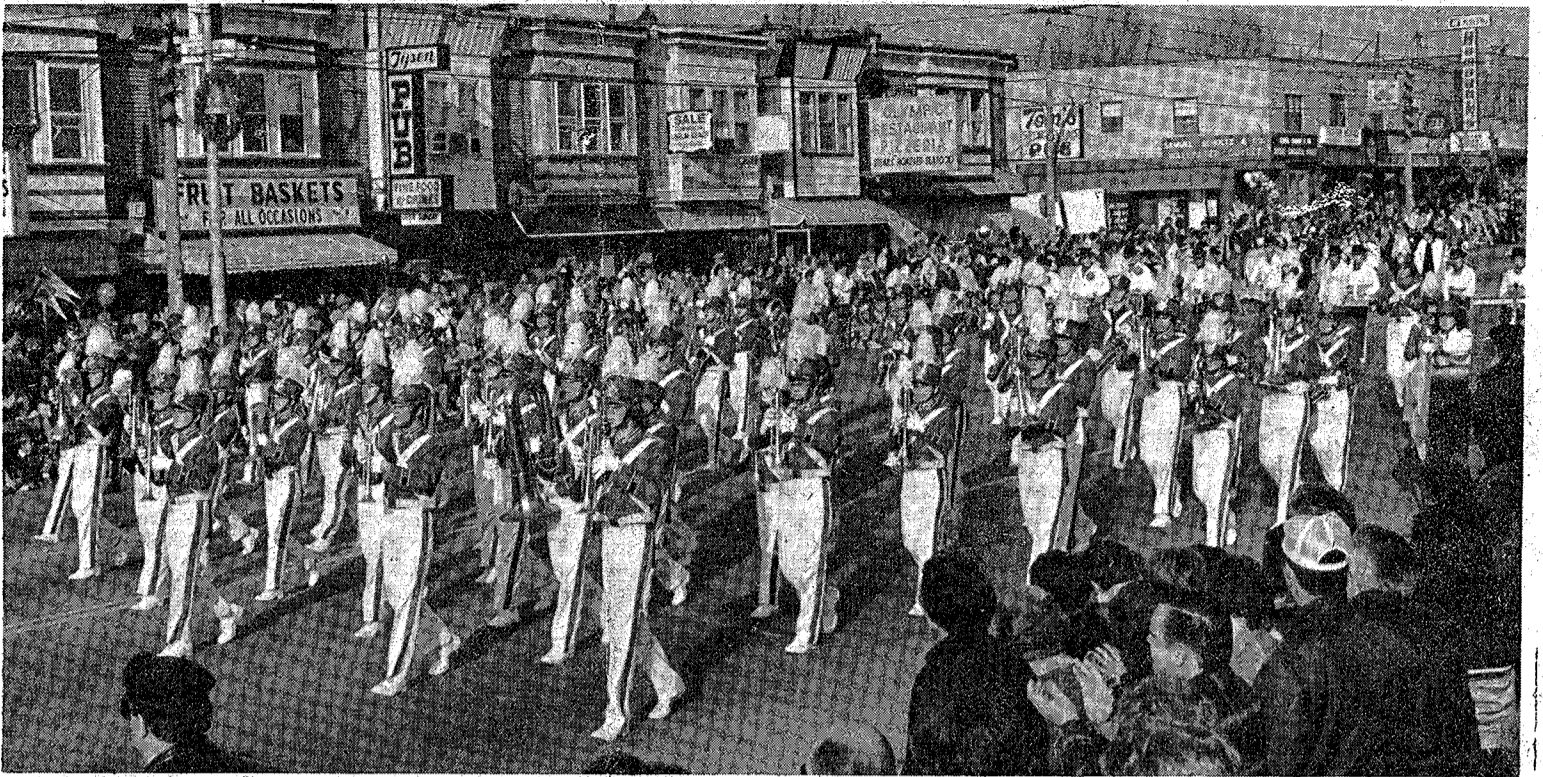
Football and marching bands seem to go together, but those associated with the marching bands that represent the high schools in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia have demonstrated for many years that their bands do more than provide entertainment for football fans while the teams are going over strategy in the locker rooms.

In the past, archdiocesan high school marching bands have won state, national, and world championships. Carrying on the winning tradition established by bands from such schools as Cardinal Dougherty and Bishop McDevitt high schools, is Archbishop Ryan High School.

For the past two years, the Ryan marching band has won its division in the Calvacade of Bands State Championships.

In 1982, Ryan won the American Division of the tournament, and this year, before a crowd of more than 10,000 at Hershey Stadium in Hershey, the Ryan band won the Yankee Division, the division in which the largest bands from around the state compete.

In winning the Yankee Division, Ryan defeated Lansdale's North Penn High



(Photo by Robert S. Halvey)

**STRIKE UP THE BAND!** — The Archbishop Ryan High School Band, shown marching in the Nov. 27 Mayfair-Holmesburg

Christmas Parade, was recently crowned state champions at the Calvacade of Bands Tournament held in Hershey, Pa.

School, a perennial powerhouse and the state champion for the past three years. The Hershey championship capped off a season of competition in which the Ryan band finished first five times and second three times in the eight tournaments it had entered.

Marching band competition can be gruelling. Many of the tournaments are held on Saturday nights, and the marching units and band members don't have much time to rest because most of the bands are scheduled to play the following day at their schools' football games. The time and the expense of maintaining a competing high school band are things that some high school administrations are not willing to take on.

It is not surprising then that only four archdiocesan schools fielded competing high school bands. The bands, representing Archbishop Ryan, Father Judge, Bishop Kenrick, and Archbishop Wood high schools, competed in tournaments in either the Calvacade of Bands circuit or the Tournament of Bands circuit.

Both circuits field bands from Catholic and public schools.

From 1954 to 1966, the Catholic Bandmasters Association, which no longer exists, sponsored annual competitions for archdiocesan high school bands at LaSalle College. During those years, Cardinal Dougherty's Marching Band was the most renowned, not only locally, but internationally as well.

In 1965, at national championships held at the Cherry Blossom Festival in Washington, D.C., the Dougherty band came in first. But their national championship was overshadowed the following year when the band was crowned World Champion at competitions held in the Netherlands.

Championships require hard work, and Gary Zimmaro, who directs Archbishop Wood High School's Marching Band, said that the kids are at it all year long.

"We actually begin practice in July, and that is only

a prelude to our band camp which opens in August," Zimmaro explained. "During August, the kids practice five mornings and one evening a week in preparation for the fall band competition and the football season."

At most schools, when the band members are not marching onto fields, they're in auditorium or music rooms rehearsing for Christmas concerts, school musicals, and other events.

As well as being a time-consuming activity, the school band can also be an expensive one. One band moderator estimates that his band will require more than \$50,000 to operate. The remarkable thing, according to the moderator, is that most of the money will come not from the school's budget but from the fundraising activities of the school's Band Parents' Association.

Most school bands have some type of parents' association that supplies not only funding but chaperones as well.

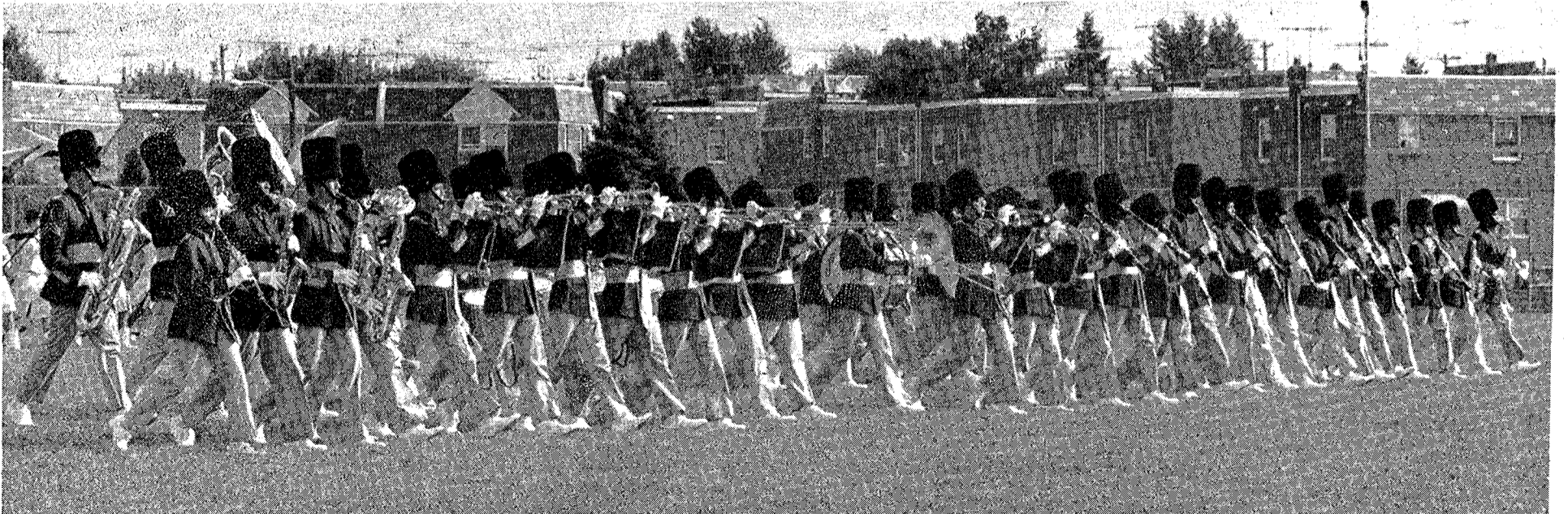
Wood's Zimmaro said that fundraising is "a year round activity" for his school's band.

"We have hoagie sales, cheese sales, and dances all year long to help raise money," he said. "Most kids own their own instruments, so we really only have to purchase uniforms and the larger instruments."

One reason why most of the Wood band members own their instruments is that, like band members in many of the archdiocesan high schools, they began paying for the instruments when they were in elementary school.

Most high school bands have intensive junior band programs involving students from parochial schools. The grade schoolers take music lessons at the high schools and begin renting the instruments. The rental fee can later be applied to the purchase of the instrument.

The feeder program, as it is known, has allowed the high schools to reach as far down as fourth grade to develop musical talent.



(Photo by Robert S. Halvey)

**WORLD CHAMPIONS** — The Cardinal Dougherty High School marches at half-time at recent football game. In 1966, the Dougherty band won the world

championship at competitions held in Europe. In 1965, the band was crowned national champions at the Cherry Blossom Festival in Washington, D.C.