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The Sun

Thursday
November 7, 2002

50 cents

DOWNERS GROVE



Tim Klein / Staff photographer

Tim O'Hagan sees no evil while practicing a frozen pose recently for part of the Downers Grove South High School marching band's halftime show. The band is now preparing for the Regional Championships this weekend in Indianapolis.

Behind the **MARCHING**

The talent of 200 meld for the Downers Grove
South marching band ■ COVER STORY, PAGES 24-26



Lydia Wilson, center, a member of the color guard, goofs off at marching band practice recently at South. The band begins competing at the Regional Championships in Indianapolis on Friday.

Stepping UP

Story by
Colt Foutz / Staff writer
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The best continues to come for revamped Marching Mustangs

It's come to this. The group of stick-wielding percussionists who stalk the sidelines at South High School's Mustang Stadium each fall have taken to talking to a plastic Indian American.

Months of musical instruction, weeks of technique, all that work is now merely accompanying the faith these students place in the toy they've christened "Mr. Bojangles."

"We kind of worship him and channel through him," said Stacie Evans, a sophomore.

"He's our good-luck charm," freshman Lindsey Christensen said.

In the downtime between the band's halftime shows and marching competitions, Mr. Bojangles can usually be found on the timpani table in the band room. The section of six students who make up "the pit" — the group of percussionists playing weighty keyboards, cymbals and other instruments — found their plastic shaman during band camp last summer. But they never found the rest of his body. Mr. Bojangles, understand, is only a head. Perhaps that's lent a special soothsaying power?

"We ask him for luck," said junior Tom Chris-

tensen, older brother to Lindsey. "We tell him what we want to get out of this performance."

And how does Mr. Bojangles reply?

"That's classified information," Lindsey Christensen said, suddenly serious. But it's too much for Mike DeMeyer.

"We talk to a plastic Indian!" he shouted, cracking up. "What's wrong with us?"

All devotion to inanimate objects aside, there's very much right with the Downers Grove South Marching Mustangs this year. In just its second season of competitive marching, the band has been buoyed by first-place showings at two exhibitions leading up to this weekend's Regional Championships in Indianapolis. Dedication to months of drilling and mastering the music has propelled the band this far, but devotion to each other is what could carry them to new levels of success.

"This is one of the best groups of people I'll ever be with," Tom Christensen said.

"We're a team," said head drum major Tracy Griffin. "We all have a common interest ... and we put our best effort into making it happen."



ABOVE: The Downers Grove South High School marching band drum line practices before performing Saturday during halftime of the varsity football game. The group was awarded Outstanding Percussion at the Wheaton North Falcon Band Tournament on Sept. 28. BELOW: Trumpet player Jeff Meiners holds his face in frustration during a practice. Band members drill over and over to avoid "judge magnets," or big mistakes that deduct points at competition.

A new tradition

Craig Roselieb took over for longtime band director Alan Roselieb — his father — in 1994. In the years since then, he's taken the group through a series of permutations, first requiring music students to join the band in order to boost its numbers, then returning marching band to voluntary status in order to recruit a core of passionate players.

Through it all, he's consulted his father, who now lives in Arizona. The band still retains the drum corps style the elder Roselieb popularized in his tenure. Back then the band was as likely to play the "New World Symphony" during football shows as it was hearty rock numbers. The junior Roselieb has retained that showmanship, with a new wrinkle: competition.

Last year the band hit the Saturday show circuit, racking up mostly second- and third-place awards, and marched in the state championships for the first time. It invested in new uniforms, new equipment and expanded its staff, adding adult instructors to refine certain areas.

"One of the things my dad said when he left was, 'The best is yet to come,' and with this program I feel that every year," Roselieb said. "I feel I'm never going to rest until my final year with it."

Helping prop up Roselieb through the long season, which began with band orientation in June, are directors Ron Hornish and Dwayne Rawl and visual coordinator Sue Kuehnhold. Kuehnhold helped design this year's show, which takes songs from "Les Miser-

ables," a musical about the French revolution, and sets them to an American theme: how life has changed since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

The show opens at a frenetic pace, with color guard and dancers evoking taxis, newsmen and the rushed and commercial-minded life before the attacks. It's an innocent time, Kuehnhold said, and that nirvana is shattered by the four planes crashing into their targets, symbolized by four white flags rushing across the field.

The next songs portray America dealing with this loss of innocence and preparing for war. One of the show's most striking visual elements occurs in the

