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Argyle HS Band at the Alamodome

Conditions must be perfect for an oyster to produce a pearl, or for the earth to form a seam of diamonds. But just such an event has occurred in our corner of southern Denton County, where the right combination of educators, students and community support has created a priceless jewel .of a high school band community

This was brilliantly illuminated this week when Argyle High School and Marcus High School both extended their reign as state marching band champions, finishing first in their respective classes at the UIL competitions at the .Alamodome in San Antonio

The two schools' band staffs are intertwined with each other and with the University of North Texas .in Denton

Argyle's band director, Kathy Johnson, is a Dallas native who graduated from UNT's acclaimed music program and taught in Lewisville and Flower Mound middle schools before taking over the Argyle program five years ago. Already two-time 2A state marching champs, under Ms. Johnson the band has scored a fifth-place finish in 3A, and now two firsts in a row in the .biennial contest

One of her former student-teachers at McKamy Middle School, Dominic Talanca, also graduated from UNT and is now an assistant director at Marcus, where Amanda Drinkwater has led the band to three state marching titles in a row in her six years as director. Kennan Wylie, yet another UNT grad, has been percussion director at Marcus for 19 years and has led .the drumline to nine national titles

Completing the circle, Mr. Wylie's percussion counterpart at Argyle, Michael Lemish, is also a UNT graduate and has .helped Argyle to all four of its state victories, beginning in 2002 as a student-teacher

.Such a clustering of talent in the area is not accidental

This whole area is just teeming with talented kids, supportive parents and excellent teachers," Ms. Johnson said. "We all " ".know each other and stay in touch as much as time allows

Argyle, competing in Class 3A on Monday, posted the highest score achievable at UIL - all five judges rated their show as No. 1 among the 10 finalist bands. The show, titled "Inside Out," explores the human journey from innocence to angst to .inner peace and features works by five modern North American composers

Marcus, competing in 5A on Tuesday, dominated with four first-place votes and one second. Marcus' show is titled "Illuminaries," in which forces of light and darkness struggle amidst the music of such classical luminaries as Bach, Mozart .and Beethoven

This year's band has distinguished themselves beyond the competitive results through their work ethic, the commitment " level of the student leadership corps, and their propensity to keep improving every single week of the season," Ms. .Drinkwater said

The success of the Marcus Band program rests upon the shoulders of the students and the incredible network of band “  
”parents. Their dedication and enthusiasm is incomparable

Indeed, all the directors stress that it’s not all about winning, or all about them. Instead, what matters is the students –  
particularly their journey in learning not just the music, but teamwork, dedication and an understanding of what it takes to  
.achieve excellence

And what a journey it is. In the state competitions, the 10 evening finalists were chosen from among dozens of bands  
competing in preliminaries earlier in the day, and from hundreds of bands that competed in regional and area competitions  
.this fall. All were winners

Texas high school bands generally begin work on their marching shows in summer band camps in 100-degree heat. When  
school starts, the shows begin to take shape in morning rehearsals, in class, and after school. Then things get really busy in  
.October, with performances at Friday night football games followed by all-day competitions on Saturdays

For Marcus, the weekend in San Antonio included a regional Bands of America contest on Saturday. So immediately after  
Friday night’s football game, an armada of buses and trucks traveled overnight to San Antonio to prepare for a 1:30 p.m.  
preliminary performance, followed by the finals in the evening. Marcus won the competition against 53 other bands from  
.Texas and Oklahoma

But the big prize is state. After two days of rehearsals and recreation on the Riverwalk, Marcus got off to what seemed like  
a shaky start in preliminaries on Tuesday, with some noticeable problems in the flagwork. But in the finals round, despite  
several band members playing under the weather, and an injured player in the percussion pit who hopped on his one good  
foot from cymbal to gong, the Marcus band turned in a perfect performance. When the last note died, tears of joy and relief  
.flowed

Ms. Johnson said the Argyle kids’ reaction was similar. “They knew they’d left it all on the field. It was very emotional. Those  
”.are memorable moments that the kids will never forget

Note: To experience the San Antonio competitions in text and photos as they happened, go to <http://live.txbands.com/>  
Also, both bands’ state finals performances can be found on YouTube. Search “Marcus HS band 2010” and “Argyle HS  
”.band 2010

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