

Life

Marching to Pasadena (video)

Former Downingtown High School principal leading district's band members to Tournament of Roses

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By PHYLLIS ROWAN, Staff Writer

Walter Kottmeyer is a very organized man. He has to be. More than 700 people are depending on him.

Kottmeyer, who lives in West Brandywine with his wife, Mary Alice, retired as principal of what was then Downingtown High School in 2002. But he has been brought back to serve as project coordinator for the Downingtown High School Blue and Gold Marching Band's trip to the Tournament of Roses Parade in Pasadena, Calif., on Jan. 1, 2011.

"I have to write everything down and then cross it off when it's done," he said as he opened his two-inch-thick three-ring binder filled with sheets of yellow-lined paper covered with notes and lists. "I've gone through several pads (of paper)."

The trip, which will run from Dec. 28 to Jan. 3, will involve 337 students from Downingtown East and West high school bands, 40 chaperones and their parents and friends traveling under the Friends and Family package.



The groups will be flying out of four different airports on nine planes, landing in two separate airports where they will get on buses to three different hotels. All the students will be staying in one hotel, Kottmeyer noted. Then there are the meals, activities and transportation to and from the activities. That doesn't even include the transportation of the band equipment across the country on trucks.

"This has pretty much turned into a full-time job," he said with a laugh.

The total cost is estimated to be about \$500,000 — just for the band members — and the organizers hope to raise at least \$300,000 to offset the students' expenses. This is being done through bingo nights, car washes, garage sales and even a dog wash. Upcoming events include a silent auction on Nov. 6 and a basketball game on Sept. 26 featuring retired members of the Harlem Globetrotters playing against the Tri-State Tornadoes, comprised of local notables including the mayor and police chief of Downingtown and state Sen. Andy Dinniman.

"It ought to be a real fun night and the band will be performing," said Kottmeyer.

The band was chosen from more than 1,000 applicants. That was narrowed down to 22 bands that will be performing in the parade — only 10 from high schools around the country.

"The Rose Bowl Parade is to bands like the Super Bowl is for football players," Kottmeyer said. He said it is estimated that this year there will be more than 1 million people watching the parade along the 5½-mile route and more than 1 billion worldwide watching it on one of the nine networks carrying the parade live.

This isn't the first Rose Parade experience for Kottmeyer. In 2001, the band — then as only one high school — performed in the prestigious parade.

"It was such a tremendous experience 10 years ago for everyone involved, not just for the band, but also for the parents and the community," he said. "I just couldn't say no to developing that same kind of spirit."

— For information on fundraising activities, visit www.dhs-mparoseparadefund.org.

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