Gateway bands take top awards in Philadelphia

Huntington – Members of the Gateway Regional High School Band and Jazz Band woke up far too early on Friday morning, April 28. Arriving at the school by 4:15 a.m., the performers were still somehow full of energy. This is, of course, because they were so excited for the trip to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania that they were about to embark on.

The groups had been preparing for months for these performances. Both ensembles had spent hours practicing both individually and as a group for the Music in the Parks festival that they were scheduled to perform in. When students arrived at the school, the competition both felt looming and a lifetime away.

After a six-hour bus ride, the 30 or so members of the bands got off the bus and stepped onto the bustling streets of Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love. The first day of the trip was spent walking miles of sidewalk to explore the rich history of the city where our nation began. It was in this city that the Declaration of Independence and Constitution were written; these same streets were walked by the giants of our country such as George Washington and Benjamin Franklin. Band members saw the Liberty Bell, Independence Hall, and toured the National Constitution Center on their first day. They ate dinner in true musical fashion at the Hard Rock Café, before ending the day with a ghost tour of “one of the most haunted cities in the country,” according to the tour guide.

Students awoke to another early morning the next day, excited for their upcoming competition. Students ate breakfast, loaded their instruments onto the bus in what proved to be a gigantic jigsaw puzzle, and stepped onto a bus they had begun to think of as their true home. As students rode the bus to New Jersey, they all sang through their instrumental parts in preparation for the performance.

The bus arrived at the high school where the competition took place just in time for the Concert Band to warm up. Three pieces were performed on stage: “Come Sweet Death” by J.S. Bach as their on stage warm-up, followed by two adjudicated selections: “Abracadabra” by Frank Tichelli, and “Aces High March” by Ron Goodwin.

As the Concert Band packed up their instruments, the Jazz Band prepared to perform their selections: “Boz” by Jeff Jarvis as their on stage warm up, and their two adjudicated pieces: “Mack the Knife” by Kurt Weil and Mark Taylor, and “The Little Dipper” by Mike Carubia. All six pieces were well received by the somewhat small audience and by the judges.

The instrumentalists and their chaperones then rode off to Six Flags Great Adventure, where they spent the rest of the day. Students rode roller coasters and played games for the day until the awards ceremony.
At the awards ceremony, which also took place at the park, it was announced that the Gateway High School Concert Band had taken second place, while the Jazz Band won first place in the A group competition, AND won first place overall for Jazz ensembles at the competition! Band students erupted into applause. The band is small, but when they get excited, they can really make some noise (even without their instruments). As the students carried the trophies back to the stands, they raised them in the air above their heads in one hand, a symbol of victory that will be remembered by all who attended.

Band director Beth Guertin and student teacher Ryan Emken both attended the trip, and were thrilled to see their bands perform so well. They understood more than anyone the amount of effort that goes into a winning performance, and were happy to see such effort be recognized.

The third day of the trip was more low-key. Students visited the claustrophobic halls of the Betsy Ross house in the morning, before going to a marketplace for lunch and shopping. Then, sadly, it was time to wave goodbye to Philadelphia, a place they had come to love over the last three days. It was a place where the band had grown closer to each other and made memories that would last a lifetime. On the ride home, Band President Anna Pless said “I’ve never been part of a band that was this together,” referring to the sense of family Gateway band students have for each other. The cross-disciplinary trip combined multiple subjects and was experienced by a tight-knit group of people, and is sure to be a trip remembered for years to come.

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Photo: Members of the Gateway Regional High School Concert Band and Jazz Band hold the three trophies they won while competing in Philadelphia last week!