

The Wildcat Chronicles

Durant High School

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Schools feel effects of referee shortage

By Katelynn Toft

In the state of Iowa, an increasing number of school sporting events at the high school and junior high level is putting a strain on officials.

Years ago, for sports like basketball and volleyball, there was a varsity game and a junior varsity game, and that was it.

Now there are games being played for varsity, junior varsity, and freshman teams, along with junior high games at the A, B, and C level, according to Lewie Curtis, the director of officials with the Iowa High School Athletic Association (IHSAA).

Iowa has about 5,000 paid high school officials, the highest number of registered officials in the last ten years, according to Mr. Curtis. But schools all over Iowa are still dealing with a referee shortage.

“There’s more teams, which causes more games, which if you have the same number of officials, there’s a lot more games for those officials to try to work,” said Mr. Curtis.

According to the IHSAA, 371 high schools in the state of Iowa field some type of sports team.

In most cases, at least two different sports are being played during one season, for example boys’ football and girls’ volleyball in the fall.

Now not all 5,000 registered officials referee the same sports. According to Mr. Curtis, who only knows the number for boys’ sports, there are around 700 baseball umpires registered. For football, there are approximately 1,100 referees working, and basketball has right around 1,700 refs.

Mr. Chuck Brittain, the basketball officials liaison for the Iowa Girls High School Athletic Union (IGHSAU), said that the number of referees for genders is relatively equal.

Both Mr. Brittain and Mr. Curtis said baseball is struggling the most with staffing umpires.

“We also have a number of people who get registered to work like softball and baseball, but they don’t work high school events,” said Mr. Curtis. “They just do it for the USSSA [United States Specialty Sports Association] or travel sports.”

Softball and volleyball also follow that trend with lower numbers in officials. Basketball usually draws in the most numbers for officials, according to Mr. Brittain.

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Photo by Garrett Pearlman

A referee makes a call at the home girls’ high school basketball game Dec. 6 against Anamosa.

Bagpiper honors Scottish roots through music

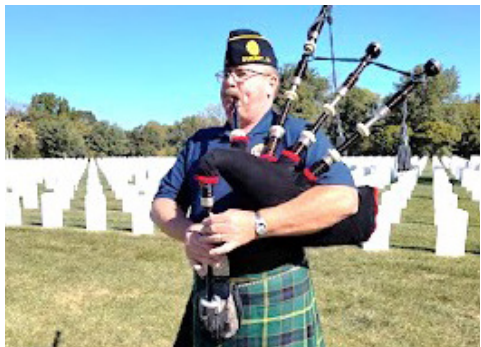


Photo contributed by Derek Grant
Former Durant graduate Derek Grant plays bagpipes at an area ceremony.

By Royce Richman

A former Durant graduate who emigrated from Scotland as a child is now a very sought after bagpipe player in the area.

Mr. Derek Grant currently resides in Davenport, but he, his parents, and his sister, Sandra, moved to the United States in January of 1968 when he was only four years old.

“My dad was a foundryman over in Scotland, and his factory was going to close, so he had some sort of publication with job openings around the world,” said Mr. Grant. “He applied to foundries in Australia, Canada, and the United States, and a little foundry in Durant, Iowa, offered him a job.”

Another Scottish couple, the MacLeods, lived in Cedar Rapids and helped

other immigrants settle in and get used to the area. Mr. Kenneth MacLeod also played the bagpipes in Scotland when he was in the army. When Mr. Grant was 10, his mother asked if he wanted to take bagpiping lessons from Mr. MacLeod.

“That didn’t sound like fun to me, so I told my mom, ‘I don’t wanna do that. That’s dumb,’” he said.

When Mr. Grant married his wife, Sue, in 1990, they had a Scottish-themed wedding and hired a man to play bagpipes at the ceremony. The MacLeods attended the wedding and were planning to move back to Scotland, so Mr. MacLeod gifted his set of bagpipes to Mr. Grant. The piper who played at the wedding, Mr. Bill Lee, also offered to give him lessons. Nowadays, Mr. Grant plays with a band called The Black Hawk Pipes and Drums of the Quad Cities.

“On our roster we have 13 pipers, all at different levels of ability, three snare drummers, and the bass drum,” he said. There are many people who play the bagpipes in Iowa and a few other bagpipe and drum bands, including one in Dubuque and two in Des Moines.

“And not everybody’s in a band of course,” he said. “Some people don’t want to be in a band. They just want to be solo pipers.”

Mr. Grant volunteers to play solo

for local Memorial Day ceremonies, along with being hired for funerals and weddings. He averages about ten events per month and 120 in a year. He occasionally stops in at Idle Hour Lanes to play for customers, according to the bartender, Carol Marolf.

“It’s always fun when Derek stops in and plays a few songs for us,” she said. “The customers love it too. It just adds a little extra touch when they’re celebrating St Patrick’s Day. And it’s pretty cool because Derek has hometown ties to Durant.”

Bagpipes are traditionally played at the funerals of servicemen and women because when Scottish and Irish immigrants got jobs in America, they were usually employed by fire and police departments.

“And when one of their mates died or was killed, they just brought along the bagpipes to play at the funeral,” said Mr. Grant. “That’s the story I’ve been told.”

Mr. Grant also served as a signalman in the U.S. Army, enlisting in his senior year at Durant High School.

“My first duty assignment was at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, with Division Support Command for the 101st Airborne Division,” he said. “I was there for a year and a half, and then I went to the Republic of Korea for a year with the First Signal Brigade.”

The sound of the bagpipe can bring tears to its listeners, and even the bagpipers

themselves have to push through their emotions when playing at funerals.

“You kind of just kind of have to rise above the situation and just play your tunes the way you want to,” he said. “I have shed a tear once in a while when I’m playing ‘cause I know the person.”

Playing the bagpipes is similar to the recorder that everyone learns in elementary school, just with a few extra pieces.

“There’s three drones, the bass drone, which is just to the left of my ear, and two tenor drones,” Mr. Grant explained. “Then the blow stick, which I blow into to keep the bag inflated. And then the melody chanter, which plays the tune. I move my fingers, covering and uncovering the holes on the chanter to make the different notes.”

Bagpipers use the G scale for their music, and the chanter can play nine natural notes, which means no sharps and flats.

“Musically it’s not as hard as keyboards and stringed instruments,” said Mr. Grant. “It can be physically difficult because you have to keep everything inflated and constant pressure on all the reeds.” Some of Mr. Grant’s favorite songs to play on the bagpipes include “Scotland the Brave” and “Amazing Grace.”

“It’s a hobby that I enjoy. I meet a lot of neat people and get to be involved in a lot of neat things.”

Wagner family makes impact on local veterans

By Allison Toft

A Durant senior is paying back area veterans in his own way by volunteering at a veterans outreach center.

“It’s really impacted a lot of the veterans that have come to our center,” Collin Wagner said. “Sometimes you have time to just sit there and talk to them and a lot of them have really cool stories that I like to listen to.”

Collin’s mom, Carla Wagner, is an advisory board member of the Quad Cities Veterans Outreach Center, which is now located at 4515 N. Fairmount St., site of the former Buchanan Elementary School. The center provides many services for veterans that help them get along in life.

“As most of them were struggling to put food on the table, it’s really helped them, and it’s helped some of them be able to even keep their homes,” Collin said.

The center provides groceries, com-

puter services, and counseling for the veterans. It also has a hair salon, a gift shop, seasonal necessities room, a sewing room, and a movie room. The center also hosts games for disabled veterans or community members such as basketball, pickleball, lacrosse and tennis.

Although the outreach is not just for services, most veterans will go to hang out at their “Happy Place,” according to Mrs. Polly Graham, an advisory board member since 2022 and a veteran herself.

“They go there for more than the services provided, which is to socialize, tell their stories, and share camaraderie,” she said.

The center opened its doors in 2016 with 37 veterans but has grown throughout the years and now reaches 4,100 veterans. The center purchased its current site from the Davenport school district last year for a cost of \$825,000, according to a news report

from *The Quad-City Times*. The center was formerly located at a facility on 35th Street in Davenport next to the RIA Federal Credit Union and then moved across from the Mississippi Valley Fairgrounds prior to its current location, according to Carla Wagner.

“The reason the Veteran Outreach Center was started is because of my godmother, Lola Vandewalle,” said Collin Wagner. “Her dad was a veteran and wanted to host an event for veterans to help them out and show their support. And over time it’s just turned into something bigger.”

Collin has previously helped at the center’s annual Veterans Salute for over 600 veterans. It is a lunch that thanks the veterans and the center’s volunteers.

“I am either checking veterans in or helping them out with whatever they need or delivering food to them,” Collin said. The center is used by veterans of all ages, and it normally sees 50-100 veterans a day.

“All ages of veterans enjoy using the services from those still on active duty in their twenties with children to those in their nineties,” said Mrs. Graham. “That wide range of registered veterans at the QC Veterans Outreach Center provides them with a feeling of purpose, no matter what timeframe they served. At one point, they all wore their uniform, proudly!”

The center means so much to so many people, and for some veterans, it’s their “extended family,” according to Mrs. Graham.

“We have given several of our veterans a purpose,” Carla Wagner said. “We’ve had several veterans that now volunteer at the center. They enjoy it so much.”

The center is open to donations, including toiletries, paper products, cleaning products, and canned or boxed food. You can also become a volunteer and make a donation at <https://www.qcvetsoutreach.com>.