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Over 100 schools come to Eau Claire for UWEC's 59th High School Honors Band

MATTHEW BAUGHMAN

Leader-Telegram staff

EAU CLAIRE — Starting at 7 a.m. on Saturday, high school students arriving at the Pablo Center have only 12 hours before they go on to perform four pieces of music.

While it is an annual event that the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire hosts during the fall, Josh Stewart, director of concert bands for the university, said more performers than ever are attending the 59th High School Honors Band concert. Over 100 schools from

Wisconsin and Minnesota are represented with students nominated to perform, as their only opportunity to practice ahead of Saturday was on their own.

"It's about helping the students learn things quickly and say, 'Hey, if you ever want to pursue a degree in music or

think about playing as a professional, one of the skill sets that you have to have is to be able to prepare things quickly because you might only get two rehearsals, three if you're lucky, before a performance," Stewart said.

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BELOW: UW-Eau Claire's Director of Concert Bands John Stewart practices with high school students as a group at the Pablo Center for the 59th annual High School Honors Band.

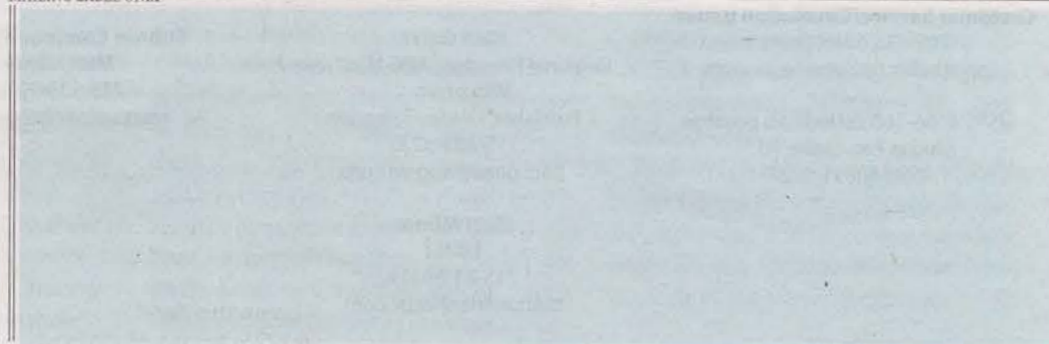
STAFF PHOTO BY MATTHEW BAUGHMAN



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Band/ from A1

"That's part of the fun for us, the puzzle of figuring out how we're going to work with the group."

Including Stewart, four conductors practiced with the groups of students throughout the day in preparation for the evening performance:

Phil Ostrander, music professor at UW-Eau Claire; Tara Metzger, UW-Eau Claire's recently appointed director of athletic bands; and guest conductor Jim Ripley, director of instrumental music at Carthage College in Kenosha, Wis.

Stewart said the day starts shortly after students arrive with an introduction to music as UW-Eau Claire's wind symphony and symphony band perform "to kind of showcase what our students can do and what we can do at the university. And to help wake them up a little bit, because sometimes they're driving three or four hours. Some will come over Friday night."

Through a schedule of group practice, working with specific music sections on parts of the songs and meeting with musical education majors from the university, the high school honors band

then gathers for a final performance at 7 p.m.

With the honors band practice and final concert having concluded over the weekend, Stewart said there are a lot of experiences they hope students can leave with. While instructors may do a lot of work trying to reinforce fundamentals and encourage good habits as a musician, another goal is to give many students a positive experience while encouraging them and teaching them how to keep playing.

"We've got some very small rural schools that might have 10 or 12 kids in their band, and they'll send one or two students here," he said. "And so for those students, this is the first time they might get to play in a band that has a section of French horns. They might be the only French horn player in their school, or they might be playing in a band for the first time where there's actually a bassoon player because a small school might not have the resources for that student to play that instrument."

Recognizing the difference in represented schools, Stewart said many of the students from smaller schools play alongside students who come from 600-member high

school bands.

"There might be a big gap between their skill level," he said, "because one student might be able to take private lessons in their school or after school and another might not be able to because of the community that they live in."

"It's special to have a student that comes from one of those programs to be able to sit next to one of the students that might not have a section made in their school, and then they can learn from each other."

While some of the high school students may not be considering colleges at this time, others may be thinking about where they want to go in the future. Whether or not they choose to go to UW-Eau Claire or pursue a music degree, Stewart said they hope they can see there is still room to continue doing music.

"So we encourage them to come to the university to come and find their group of people," Stewart said. "Some will come and love marching band and want to be in the marching band only and major in English, or some will come and major in math and love jazz and want to audition to play in a jazz band, and you can do that."