

The historic sounds of the Scottish Highlands. The pageantry of the military parade. The Scots ancestry so many of us share in the Appalachian Mountains. What is it about the Great Highland bagpipe and the sound of the drums that draws us to the proceedings? And why would we join? For seven “seniors” who recently joined the Garrett Highlands Pipes and Drums (GHPD), it was for various reasons, but had much to do with wanting to make music part of our retirement plans and pursue a long standing interest in being part of this great community band. John MacGowan of Swanton was 28 when he first attended the World Pipe Band Championship in Scotland. Later, in 1990, he first saw the band marching in the Garrett County Autumn Glory Parade. He asked the Hon. Fred Thayer, one of the GHPD founders and pipe major, about the band and was told that GHPD was a “teaching” band. When John moved to Garrett County full-time, he joined the band in 2002 then under the direction of Pipe Major Jerry McGee. Now John plays at as many functions as his schedule allows and provides assistance to the band as its Archivist.

Kenny Braitman, who has horses and a blacksmith shop in Eastern Garrett County with his wife, Annie Bristow (also a “senior” and the band’s primary bagpipe instructor), chose to learn drums at age 58 and took up pipe instruction at age 62. “I became interested when I heard my wife playing with the band and enjoyed the uniqueness of Great Highland Pipes and their most unusual sound. It strongly lends itself to certain types of music.” Annie says of her motivation, “I started playing pipes when I was 25 and was with the Dallas band but stopped a few years later when I had a baby and then moved from Texas. I always wanted to get back to them, which I did the summer of 2004, at age 54, by registering for a GCC continuing education class with Jerry McGee. It was part of my retirement planning.” Lynn McClive Farnsworth joined at 61 after an invitation from a band member to learn the tenor drum; this drum is fun to play especially because of the theatrics. The tenor drummers are those who have learned the special technique of spinning their drumsticks around between beats, which adds great flare to the performance. Lynn was motivated, like many of our new members, because she missed music in her life. She had played oboe and cello 40 years ago. Kenny played clarinet, John guitar, and Marci McClive played French horn. Marci has performed from time to time as a recorder player in the Marsh Mountain Renaissance Consort for the last 30 years, but her lifelong dream to play Scottish Highland tunes was satisfied when she retired from teaching. “I happened to meet Annie Bristow in the hall at Frostburg State and she told me she was starting up a bagpipe instruction class. I didn’t even hesitate. I can’t believe I finally got a chance to play this marvelous instrument.”

When asked about her learning experience, Lynn said “I learned to play the tenor drum from short classes before each rehearsal; folks couldn’t have been more encouraging.” Kenny and Marci met for piping instruction for 10 lessons and then had the same encouraging experience among the pipers who suggested the pair play their practice chanters while the band practiced. They were given helpful hints about how to setup and tweak their pipes for the best sound and managing their stamina. John suggests “the bagpipes are not as hard as they look and the teachers are really supportive and helpful. The band is a great bunch of supportive people.” And, we were all given much advice about the wearing of the “uniform.” All members of GHPD wear the traditional Scottish kilt of the Colquhoun (pronounced Ca’hoón) in honor of Judge Thayer’s ancestry.

The band plays a regular series of parades and special concerts, all of which can be viewed online at <http://www.garrettpipes.com/event.html>. Most events are played within the county for the various town festivals and organizations. Because GHPD is proudly associated with the Oakland Volunteer Fire Department (OVFD), it plays an important role at the Autumn Glory festival with the Fireman’s Parade on Thursday, a concert at the fire hall on Saturday, and marching with a color guard from OVFD in the Autumn Glory Feature parade on Saturday. The band also performs throughout the spring and summer at various Highland Festivals and parades in the tri-state area.

When discussing what it is like to be in a parade at an older age, Kenny says, “I would say that marching in a parade is enjoyable, you contribute to the community, to band members, and the audience is always new as you progress down the road.” This is spoken by a determined man who is a double leg amputee from the Viet Nam War, and who musters the energy to walk the parade routes, some as long as a mile. “Parades are challenging for older folks but most can be done, and there is the thrill of being in a good hometown parade,” adds Lynn. For Marci it is the honor of wearing the uniform of her heritage, of playing well, and hearing the response of the crowd. She agrees with John who says “John It is soooo much fun to give delight to people.” GHPD provides fanfare of a different kind and is honored to be led by members of OVFD in a color guard. A Highland military

band typically has an official drum major in the lead and official banner bearers or “guidon”, great positions for older adults. These positions require only that the person learn about marching and practice the moves that go with marching a parade route while the band stops and starts its music. The band is currently recruiting individuals for these positions.

When the band stands still in “clan circle” to perform, even more can be accomplished. Kenny: “Concerts are most fun for me because you don't have to walk a great distance and you can focus solely on the music. It also provides opportunity to play songs which are difficult to march to.” The band has a repertoire of many tunes, which does offer a challenge to the new player. John: “We have to memorize everything; there are no music stands for bagpipes.” But new pipers and drummers are coached along. Not everyone has to play everything right away. What these seniors are finding out is that the challenge of learning new tunes has a very positive impact on their memory skills, provides motivation to practice often, and keeps them physically active. With respect to attending practices each Wednesday at the Oakland fire hall, Kenny says, “I play each week with the band to improve my performance, see my friends, and hear fun music.”

GHPD operates under the direction of Pipe Major Paul Browning. Alma Glotfelty is the Clan Chief. GHPD is governed by a board elected within the membership and includes members of rank. In military style, it is possible for all members of the band to earn higher rank. Band business is decided very collegially however. In addition to regular business meetings, band members get together for social gatherings which they all enjoy.

Individual members of the band play at private affairs and occasionally represent GHPD at special events. Recently, Cecil Glotfelty, himself a veteran, performed Amazing Grace at the Garrett College 911 memorial for those service men and women lost in the Afganistan and Iraq wars over the last ten years. Other members of the band play in other community groups as well. Lynn Farnsworth plays percussion for the Garrett County Community Band and she, Kenny, Annie and Marci have formed a small ensemble called Mòrbheanna in which they play Gibson Fireside pipes, a smaller, indoor version of the Great Highland pipe.

GHPD offers regular instruction for pipe and drum students. GHPD is also recruiting new auxiliary members for parade duty. If you are interested in joining the group, contact our Drum Sergeant, Richard Kutchman, (ringorick@hotmail.com) or our Pipe Sergeant, Annie Bristow (piperannie@gmail.com). Or you may call Marci McClive at 301.501.0304. To learn an instrument, 15 lessons are provided usually for 15 weeks at a total price of \$300. If you join the band and remain playing for one year, 50% of your lesson cost is returned. Scholarships may be available. Location and time of lessons are arranged with both the student and instructor's schedule in mind. Pipers eventually purchase their own set of bagpipes. Drums are generally provided by the band. While winter lessons are being offered by contacting Annie or Rick, lessons will also be offered though Garrett College's Continuing Education Division starting in April or May. You should contact Sarah at 301.387.3069 to get on their contact list.

What's in a uniform? For parades, the band wears a special shirt with the band's logo and blue “hose” with red “flashes” (socks and garters). All wear the practical “sporrán” or pouch worn from the belt. For formal occasions, members wear white shirt and tie and the black Argyll jacket. And the special shoes, Ghille brogue, are traditional. Military hardware includes the sgian dubh (skain doo) in the right “hose” and drummers traditionally wear the dirk, or long dagger. Most members of the band have chosen special buckles, kilt pins, and clan badges on their “bonnets” to honor their family history. The Grant clan tartan square worn on the GHPD bonnets honors Rev. John Grant, who recently retired from the band after many years of service. GHPD provides parts of the uniform while individual members are responsible for some of the clothing.

For John MacGowan, living in Garrett County and having access to the high quality of performing arts here is a joy. “We are fortunate to live in an area that has so many opportunities for hearing and participating in the arts. GHPD is another musical group you can join in addition to, say, the community band, choral society and other small groups. So don't just sit on the curb and watch the parade pass you by. Stand up, put on a kilt and join in.” His grandfather, who was born in Scotland, would be very proud, aye?