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**Great Entertainment**
...with a VIEW!**Community News****Local kids carry on Scottish tradition**

By: Andrea Jensen, photos by Kenneth Gatlin, Journal Newspapers

12/01/2004

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It's a favorite musical tradition handed down by few nowadays. We love to see them march past us in our city's parade. Cheeks inflated, noses red, kilts no matter what the temperature, these musicians are a dying breed. But some say, that just isn't so.

Just when you think Scottish music is lost forever and most teenagers are probably glued to their digital video games, a 16-year old blares his favorite Scottish tune in a growing band called the Northwest Junior Pipe Band.

Led by Kevin Auld, who's been playing bag pipes for 15 years, the junior pipe band recruits young people from all around the Seattle area from ages 8 to 18. He and his Washington Scottish Pipe Band brothers, teach the youngsters from beginning to advanced.

Members of the Northwest Junior Pipe Band compete at local Highland Games festivals.

"I sort of fell into it. I started at this very high school when I was a sophomore," said Auld. Sitting in Shorecrest High School's cafeteria, Auld turns toward a beginning drummer, flutes

a melody through his chanter (a practice mouth piece) and hands it to one of his students.

Auld directs close to twenty teenagers every Thursday night. Some of them pipers, others are drummers.

The group has been active since 1995 and was originally run by Charlie McNeill. A Scottish emigrant, McNeill passed away leaving a legacy of bag pipe with Auld. It wasn't until several years later that Auld regenerated the group.

"The reason I did this is because of the kids," explained Auld. "There is a lack of passion in young people these days. There's nothing tying people to their heritage. It gives them something that's different, something rooted in tradition."

Auld not only shows young people musical tradition of the past, he says piping has shown kids a different way to live. "I take kids who had nothing going for them - bad crowd, no family, into drugs - and watch them totally turn around. That is so wonderful to see," he said.

It was the Highland Games that attracted fellow piper Christine Simontacchi. "I always went to the Highland Games and really wanted to (learn to play) after I saw the pipers," she recalls. It wasn't until three years ago she found Auld as a teacher. But the pure fact that it was different is why she continues playing and hopes to apply for a bag piping scholarship.

And that's why Auld says most of his students first start - they want to be different. "Not all their friends are doing it. It's loud and obnoxious, parents hate it, but it's a better alternative to the electric guitar," laughs Auld.

Alternative is right. Bag pipes can be heard from great distances, whether the players are inside or out. But that's no matter to him and his bag pipers, they only hope to compete in upcoming festivals and top out at each grade level.

"It's a big family," said Simontacchi. She and fellow drummer Julia Raymond love the social aspect of the group.

"I get to meet new people at festivals, see my friends and cousin," says Raymond. Whose dad is a veteran piper, exposing her early to the Highland Games.

The games, a mixed entourage of everything Scottish features this year at the King County Fairgrounds July 30 through Aug. 1. They will have piping, drumming, dancing, athletic events, Scottish food, and much more. And performers like Auld in the Washington Scottish, tooting their best for placement.

He's a man who's spread to the max with piping ventures. Along with leading the Northwest Junior Pipe Band, he holds private lessons, and performs in Piper's Creek, and the Washington Scottish.

The Northwest Junior Pipe Band will get their wish of competition this year. With a long list of events and festivals to compete in, the band will also be on the field at the Seattle Highland Games as well as several other regional Highland Games. Last year was their first year doing this, which has fueled much excitement for the younger members who are just getting started.

This year the band lucked out with some new advertising. As a senior project, students from The Art Institute of Seattle chose a non-profit to design promotion material. This year the band was awarded services, including everything from brochures to a new website and logo posters. A donation Auld couldn't be more excited about. "I think it's fantastic. To have such a well-known and respected art school providing professional-quality art services for us is a dream. It's great for a small arts organization like ours to look professional. Our print materials and website are our public face," he said.

Auld and his fellow bag pipers have begun a major recruiting drive to get more children into Scottish bag piping and drumming. When most of his students hit 18 they age out of the group and move onto college, so he says it's important to actively seek new students. One way of doing this is by branching out to several different school districts and communities.

For more information about the Northwest Junior Pipe Band, please contact Kevin Auld at (206) 499-8269 or visit www.seattlepiper.com.

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