

## Hard Work and Dedication Pays off in Many Ways for Gehlen Catholic Band Director

The honors and awards are mounting up for the Gehlen Catholic Instrumental Music Department these days. Most recent, the Marching Jays placed 1st in Class 1A at the 2009 Champs Sports (former Citrus) Bowl in Orlando, FL. They also won all six caption awards in Class 1A. The band received a score of 80 points from the DCI judges - placing 5.6 points behind Class 3A winners, Battlefield High School in Virginia. This follows trips to the 2005 Liberty Bowl and 2007 Alamo Bowl.



What makes these achievements even more incredible is that as little as 15 years ago, only 12 Gehlen Catholic High School students participated in the instrumental music program, with another 13 students in the elementary program.

“Gehlen Catholic has always been blessed with a great music department throughout the school’s history. Each teacher has shared their talents, as God called them, in different ways. I feel the current success of our program truly belongs to past instrumental music faculty, my assistant Cliff McMurray, the entire faculty, students, parents, boosters, and administration of Gehlen Catholic and of course, this supportive community,” said Paul Niebuhr, current Instrumental Music Director.

A humble statement from a man who has dedicated his life to helping his students accomplish incredible achievements. Lisa Niebuhr, Paul’s wife, also works at Gehlen Catholic as the Development Director. In addition, she serves as the Color Guard Director for the program. “Paul has worked tirelessly to make this program the success that it is today for the students,” she said. Niebuhr explained that since her husband took over the program 15 years ago, the Gehlen Catholic band program has grown from 25 students to 125 students now participating in concert, pep, honor, competition marching, jazz 1 and 2 and solo and ensemble band.

“Of course, there were some trying years in the beginning. I remember when the marching band program was young, they tried their new routine out during the halftime show of a football game. These poor kids were actually booed off the field! It was traumatic for everyone, but immediately following that unfortunate incident, the support poured in. We received calls and letters from parents, boosters and the administration encouraging Paul and the students to stay the course and it will all work out,” she said. And it certainly has.

“While my husband has put in a lot of time and effort, none of this would have been possible without the students working so hard and the support of parents, the administration, the diocese and the community,” she said.

However, Niebuhr's dedication to building Gehlen's music program into powerhouse has come with some sacrifices. The Niebuhrs lived in Kingsley. Lisa had to take on most of the parenting duties of school and extracurricular activities while Paul was away putting in long hours and commuting. After much discussion, they decided to enroll their children, Elias, Elisabeth and Evan, at Gehlen in 2002. Then, in 2003, Lisa was hired as Development Director with the school, which brought the family together.

"Commuting from Kingsley every day was taking a toll on the family. But we were committed to Gehlen Catholic. Everyone, from the administration to the parents to the kids, has been so supportive and so involved in building the band program into something to really be proud of. We decided to make the move to Le Mars last fall to become even more involved in this great community."

Not long after the Niebuhrs moved into their LeMars home, their garage roof started leaking. The Niebuhrs immediately thought to call Nohava Construction for a quote to fix the roof. "It was a way we could thank them for all their support of Gehlen Catholic and the band program over the years. They were so responsive, not only replacing the garage roof, but making repairs to the main home roof as well. Their quick turnaround time really saved us from extensive damage. Imagine my shock when they told us they were donating everything...the materials and labor!" Lisa said, adding, "It's people like the Nohavas that make us feel blessed on a daily basis."

Brenda Nohava, Vice President of Nohava Construction said, "While we normally focus on larger commercial buildings, we gladly responded to the Niebuhr's call. Both Paul and Lisa have done so much for Gehlen Catholic, the students – mine included – and the community, it was just a small way to say thank you for such hard work and dedication."

Lisa said all the hard work, sacrifices, moves and even the leaky roof, has been worth it, adding "The most important thing is making children more well rounded, in academics, sports, music, vocal and more. These kids work so hard not just on their musical skills, but on working together to earn money to go to competitions across the country. They take on all kinds of jobs in the community to pay their expenses, like emptying millions of boxes and crushing cones, covering silage piles with thousands of tires and relabeling pet food. Those are valuable work ethic lessons that will serve them well into their future."

## **Gehlen Catholic Instrumental Music Program Honors in Recent Years**

### **2009**

#### **Marching Band**

- 1st Place, Class 1A Starfest
- Division "I" Rating – IHSMA State Marching Band Contest
- 1st Place, Class 1A Dutchmen Field Championships, plus Best Color Guard, Best Horn Line, Best Percussion, and Triple "S" Spirit (Sportsmanship) Award by Pizza Ranch
- 1st Place, Class 1A, 2009 Champs Sports (former Citrus) Bowl plus Best Color Guard, Best Percussion, Best Drum Major, Best General Effect, Best Marching, Best Music awards
- Bowl Games of America has invited to the Gehlen Catholic band to wherever they want to go next. BGA is responsible for organizing, planning, and putting on the half-time shows for various Bowl Games throughout the country. They also host marching band contests, adjudicated by Drum Corps International & Bands of America judges.

#### **Jazz Band**

- Qualified for the Iowa State Jazz Championships – spring 2009
- 1st place – Class 1A – Iowa Lakes Jazz Festival – spring 2009
- 2nd place – Class 1A – NWIBA District Jazz Festival – spring 2009
- 3rd place – Class 1A – Lewis & Clark Jazz Festival – spring 2009
- 2nd or 3rd place – Class 1A – USD Jazz Festival – spring 2009

#### Non-competition Marching Band

- Iowa All State Music Festival in Ames – Students Robin Yoerger, Omar Aleman and Emily Hutchins selected to perform
- NW Iowa Honor Orchestra -- Emily Hutchins and Elias Niebuhr selected to perform in honor orchestra opened to schools that do not have an orchestra program – spring

#### Solo & Ensemble

- Best of Center Soloist awards – 6 consecutive years – Iowa High School Music Association’s Solo and Ensemble
- Numerous “I” ratings at Heelan Band Olympics and IHSMA State Solo and Ensemble Contests

### **2008**

#### Marching Band

- 1st Place, Class 1A Starfest
- Division “I” Rating – IHSMA State Marching Band Contest
- 1st Place, Class 1A Dutchmen Field Championships, plus best Drum Major, Best Color Guard, Best Marching and Maneuvering, and Best Percussion

#### Jazz Band

- 2nd place – Class 1A – USD Jazz Festival - spring

### **2007**

- 3rd place – Class 1A – 2007 Alamo Bowl plus Mass Band participant
- 3rd Place, Class 1A StarFest
- 1st Place Class 1A Algona Band Day Field Contest
- 1st Place Class 1A Dutchmen Field Championship, Best Drum Major,
- Best Color Guard, Spirit Award Recipient
- Div. “I” Rating – IHSMA State Marching Band Contest Jazz Band
- 2nd place – Class 1A – USD Jazz Festival -- spring

### **2006**

#### Marching Band

- 1st Place Class 1A StarFest
- 1st Place Class 1A Algona Band Day Field Contest
- Dutchmen Field Championship – 1st Place Class 1A, Best Drum Major, Best Marching and Maneuvering, Best Horn Line Class 1A, Spirit Award Recipient
- Div. “I” Rating – IHSMA State Marching Band Contest – First in Gehlen Catholic’s history.

### **2005**

#### Marching Band

- 2nd Place Class 1A StarFest
- 2nd Place Class 1A Algona Band Day Field Contest
- Dutchmen Field Championship – 2nd Place Class 1A, Best Drum Major, Best Marching and Maneuvering Class 1A, Spirit Award Recipient
- Liberty Bowl Participant – Memphis, TN

### **2004**

#### Marching Band

- 1st Place Class 1A Dutchmen Field Championship, Best Drum Major, Best Marching and Maneuvering Class 1A
- 2nd Place Class 1A Algona Band Day Field Contest
- 3rd Place Class 1A Star Fest - Sixth year participating at StarFest. 10 consecutive years top 3 placing Class 1A in field or street at Algona Band Day.