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Band tunes up for performances at Geauga fair

By **BRIAN DOERING**

Everyone loves a good old-fashioned county fair, spending time with family and friends eating delicious fair food, riding the rides with the kids, watching the chicken flying contest, dropping in on a grandstand show and catching some good-old fashioned entertainment by the Great Geauga County Fair Band.

Organized in 1937, the iconic band is Ohio's only all-volunteer county fair band. It became known as the official fair band playing at every Geauga fair since 1938 thrilling audiences with show tunes, marches, polkas and patriotic compositions.

"I think this is probably going to be one of

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the biggest fairs because people were pent up and didn't have any place to go, and the fair is just a great place to go for families," said Geauga County Fair Band Director Jack Blazey. The fair is Sept. 2-6.

Mr. Blazey said the band played last year after the state limited county events to junior fairs only due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

"You know, last year's fair was pared down, it was just a junior fair and we played," he said. "We didn't start [rehearsing and playing] last year until July and had one concert outside the fair, and then three concerts during the fair."

Having been a member of the fair band since 1995, Mr. Blazey took over as director in 2017.

Music is an intricate part of his life, having retired as a high school band director after 30 years. "I have been in music since my parents had me take piano lessons when I was in the first grade," said Mr. Blazey.

In addition to the fair band, Mr. Blazey sings with the Cleveland Orchestra and does a lot of work for area band directors.

"I love music and I want people to have the same passion that I do," said Mr. Blazey.

During most years, the fair band starts its season the first Tuesday of April and ends it after the Great Geauga County Fair.

Rehearsals for April and May are held at Berkshire High School and then move to the fairgrounds in Burton in June.

"The first Tuesday in June we move over to the fairgrounds to the Vernon Howard Pavilion, which is where we give our concerts and we rehearse at the pavilion until Labor Day weekend," said Mr. Blazey. "Once Labor Day happens, we're done."

The Vernon Howard Pavilion is the namesake of charter band member Vern Howard who started the band at age 15 and played well into his 80s.

Mr. Blazey said there are 45 active members in the band today and the original band was created to perform at the fair and to help kids stay sharp by practicing their musical



The Great Geauga County Fair Band practices at the fairgrounds in preparation for the upcoming and much anticipated county fair. This year's beloved event is estimated to be the biggest of all, according to Band Director Jack Blazey, after last year's limitations due to the coronavirus pandemic.

instruments over the summer.

"In the late 1930s and early 1940s it was just starting up because area band directors wanted their kids to keep playing their instruments during the summer months," said Mr. Blazey.

The band has had members from seven counties in Northeast Ohio including Geauga, Cuyahoga, Lake, Portage, Ashtabula, Trumbull and Lorain and receives its financial support from the Geauga County Fair Board.

"They are so generous, they are just wonderful people and so supportive of the band," said Mr. Blazey. "You know, the community also gives us donations and we're happy to take the donations, but it's not necessary because the fair board is so generous in their support."

It takes a lot of hard work from the iconic band to put on a great show for people who attend the fair.

"My goal as director is to have quality

concerts throughout the summer, but then, you know, we have 11 concerts in a five-day period at the fair and I like to have a different concert, a different repertoire of our music at every concert," said Mr. Blazey.

Mr. Blazey said that one of the songs they are famous for is "Stars and Stripes Forever."

"I've played in community bands all over the country and that's just a very popular tune to the audience as well as band members," said Mr. Blazey. "But in regard to the ones that they look forward to playing, I think that's the one."

The band will be playing at this year's fair every day at 10:30 a.m. and 7:30 p.m. and on Sept. 6 at 1:30 and 4:30 p.m.

For more information and if anyone is interested in joining the Fair Band, visit <https://www.geaugafair.com/geaugafairband.html>.