27 Years of Celebrating Brass
By Victoria DiMartile

Some might say it takes a village to raise a child, but it also takes a village of dedicated volunteers, committee directors, sponsors and community partnerships to bring one of Danville’s most well-known and well-loved festivals to life each summer. Niki Kinkade and Leigh Jefferson have a relentless work ethic and a contagious affection for Danville’s Great American Brass Band Festival. Kinkade is in her eighth year as festival director, and Jefferson has been working for the festival since January 2014. They lead many volunteers and committees and board members while consistently ensuring the festival is a memorable and action-packed weekend of family fun. From the marketing and social media to the bands, contracts, and logistics, this dynamic duo encapsulates the enduring spirit of Danville, a town with big-hearted individuals and even bigger ambition.

The Great American Brass Band Festival (GABBF) continues to harbor the same spirit and community-based mission that was initially instilled by its founding members, Dr. George Foreman, the former director of Centre College’s Norton Center for the Arts, and Dr. Vince DiMartino, Professor Emeritus of Centre College. The idea was formulated on a road trip to Cincinnati where the two planned to collect band memorabilia. It soon spiraled into the multi-layered musical extravaganza we know today.

With GABBF now in its 27th year, Kinkade and Jefferson plan to delight festivalgoers with new treats while continuing to embrace the traditions that have been integral to its success. Through many years of growth and change, one thing remains at the heart of this small-town gem: the power of music to bring people together. “As co-founder of the event, I think one of GABBF’s most important accomplishments is bringing every part of our city together to put this event on as a unit. People who see each other once a year unite to make Danville the center of the brass world,” remarks DiMartino.

The Brass Band Festival will feature the atmosphere and musical talents festivalgoers have come to love, but it is also evolving and improving. The Festival has expanded its artistic committee with six new members that handle performances and artistic theme. “We’re maintaining who we are but we’re also bringing some new perspective,” comments Kinkade. This year’s festival will also feature new partnerships, sponsors, and community-driven activities, as well as a fresh variety of bands.

The festival will continue to provide a fun celebration of music while developing its mission to incorporate educational and cultural...
aspects. “Typically, we have about 12 to 15 bands performing at the festival. But this year, we have 21 bands, and those include some collegiate bands, so it’s a turn to the younger generation as we make a big education push.” And also this year, for the first time, the Danville and Boyle County high school bands will be marching in the parade, spotlighting our local brass talent. “We want to ensure that year-round we’re helping this community celebrate music and art. Our Youth T-shirt Design Contest and Kids Art Fest, a new event this year, are ongoing creative projects that keep kids actively thinking about the arts,” says Jefferson.

While the festival will include new outlets to engage the younger Danville population, it will also continue to embrace the many cultural manifestations of brass, such as a new ticketed event called “Brassanova.” This celebration features Brazilian brass and food and honors the cultural influence of brass bands and their impact on world music.

As summer approaches, community members can anticipate the familiar croon of trumpets, the bold hot flavors of Louisiana lingering in the streets and a musical heartbeat that can be felt throughout Danville. While this hometown favorite unites neighbors, business partners and families from downtown and across the bypass, it also entices visitors from 42 states who can’t resist the Southern charm and hospitality of this long-standing tradition.

As this festival combines new and old events and activities, we hope you’ll bring friends new and old, to swing dance, eat and enjoy the best of the Bluegrass and beyond. This year’s GABBF theme, “Brass in Community: Celebrating a National Pastime,” brings together the best of Danville, those who went before and those that carry the torch. Twenty-seven years ago, a foundation and legacy were built by two musicians eager to share their passion with the world. Today, two women, proud of their state and community, continue to work wholeheartedly to ensure the next generation dances to their own beat and makes memories while doing it.

Mark your calendars: The Great American Brass Band Festival is June 2-5! The May issue of Boyle County Neighbors will highlight bands and scheduled events to further whet your appetite for this fun summer weekend. In the meantime, please visit www.gabbf.org for more information.

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