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## McDowell High gives college band shelter



The Minuteman Marching Band from the University of Massachusetts practices in the rain Thursday night at McDowell's football field. (JACK HANRAHAN/Erie Times-News)

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By VERONICA GORLEY  
[veronica.gorley@timesnews.com](mailto:veronica.gorley@timesnews.com)

Instead of playing their instruments Thursday, McDowell High School's marching band played host to the 330-member Minuteman Marching Band from the University of Massachusetts.

The visiting band spent the night at McDowell Intermediate High School — the halfway point in the nearly 900-mile journey between home and Indianapolis, where they will perform this weekend.

More than 30 McDowell band members came out just to see what a 330-piece band looks like.

"It's a great experience to see what a college band is all about," said Danny Pietrusinski, a 16-year-old trombonist.

The Minuteman Marching Band is headed to perform at the RCA Dome — home of the Indianapolis Colts — for a special performance during a national Bands of America high school marching-band championship.

After an 8 1/2-hour bus ride and a hearty spaghetti dinner, the college musicians looked sleepy — until they took to the field.

Their director, George Parks, counted out numbers and instructions, and the students energetically mimicked their routines and voiced their parts — some in yells, some in falsetto voices.

All the while, a steady drizzle dampened the band as they marched on the illuminated Gus Anderson Field. The band is more than three times the size of the 99-piece McDowell band.

For the high school musicians, it was a sight to behold.

"I'm just amazed by the size," Pietrusinski said as he took in the band, which stretched nearly the field's length. "You don't really see this size around here."

But Glenn Howe of Chelmsford, Mass., said he didn't mind the attention.

"I hope they really enjoy it and are inspired by what we do," the 20-year-old trumpeter said. "And maybe we'll pick up a few new members."

"It's definitely one of the big ways of recruiting," said Shari Warden, a 19-year-old euphonium player from Rowley, Mass.

The band will showcase its skills again today at 9:30 a.m. during a voluntary assembly. Depending on the weather, the show will be at either Gus Anderson Field or in the McDowell Intermediate gymnasium.

The Massachusetts band stayed at McDowell because the Minuteman and McDowell band directors have known each other since the 1970s.

Then, they were associated with different bands. Minuteman's Parks played in the Reading-based Buccaneers drum and bugle corps, and McDowell's Dave Hetrick performed with the Erie Thunderbirds.

Hetrick said he's amazed to see such a big band at McDowell, and he hopes his students appreciate it, too.

"The kids are going to see what a 330-piece band — one of the best college bands in the country — looks like and sounds like," he said.

The band came with an entourage. Six tour buses carried the students; equipment was stored in two or three trucks; and parents followed in a car and van, said Albert Graff of Chelmsford.

Graff launched a Web site, [www.powerandclass.info](http://www.powerandclass.info), for band parents and supporters. He said he's attended every Minuteman performance in the five years his son, a fifth-year senior, has attended the university.

He said being a university band booster is much like being a high school band booster.

"Once a band parent, always a band parent," Graff said.

After practicing outside in the drizzle and inside in small groups, the students rolled out sleeping bags in the gymnasium to crash for the night.

"We do spend a lot of nights on gym floors," Howe said. "Even though you get only three hours of sleep a night and sleep on gym floors, it's a lot of fun. It makes you appreciate hard work."

VERONICA GORLEY *can be reached at 870-1702 or by e-mail.*

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