

Student musicians arrive home from celebration on a happy note

By Loraine McClish
staff writer

ONLY ONE FIRST prize was awarded in the All-American Inaugural Music Festival, and the North Farmington High School Symphony Band took it. And of the two second awards given, the North Farmington High School Chamber Orchestra took one of those.

There have been a lot of cheering and congratulations in the school halls, and the young musicians returned visitors from the institutional competitive whirlwind round of events in conjunction with the presidential inauguration. If there was a discordant note at all, it came from the man who led the trip.

"I haven't the vaguest idea of what we're going to do with these trophies," said North Farmington's music director, Carl Gippert. "They are so big we can't put them in the showcase. If we did there wouldn't be room for anything else."

But Gippert was smiling when he looked at the pair of three-foot tall trophies topped with large brass music notes. His musicians had won those trophies in competition with 17 of the best high school bands in the country.

The selection process of choosing high school bands (for the inaugural weekend) began with a blanketing of every high school in the country, so we were proud and excited to have been invited to be part of this national historic event.

"Winning in our school's first time out in a national competition during

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— Carl Gippert
North Farmington music director

a national historic event will be unforgettable," Gippert said.

ONE OF THE jobs for the Presidential Inauguration Committee is to keep the good will throughout Washington, D.C., as high as gala, as festive as it can get.

This is done by bringing in music, singing, dancing and instrumental groups from every region throughout the United States for performances at every spot a visitor is likely to stop.

So the invitation to compete in the music festival carried with it the responsibility to perform.

"We watched a really great clogging troupe from Oklahoma that was before us in one of our sets. Their performances while we were waiting to go on. That whole schedule was running late, which held us up a bit — and our schedule was tight," Gippert said.

THE TIGHT schedule can be best understood by Gippert's words when he said that on one day "it was lights out at midnight and up at 4:30 a.m."

Even so, getting through the

crowds from one site to another, and keeping together 82 students and 82 instruments with another 17 volunteers and parent-chaperones went quite smoothly.

"We had excellent help from a travel agent for us. Together our students are good at keeping tabs and taking care of one another. We knew exactly how many seats there were on a bus that had to be filled every time we moved. No problem there," Gippert said.

FUND RAISING and planning for the three-day trip began last August when Gippert received the official invitation and began the process of getting the official blessings from the school administration, the school's booster club, and the students' parents.

Among the highlights of the trip were performances at the Old Post Office and at the U.S. Soldiers and Airmen's Home. Another was laying a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington Cemetery.

Another highlight was securing 100 tickets for space to view the inaugural parade — no small favor to come through the offices of U.S. Rep. William Broome (R-14th District).

"It was long hours in rehearsal in preparation and long hours on the bus, but a great honor," Gippert said. "We were the only school in Michigan invited to participate in the festival, so we carried not only the honor of our school and our immediate community, but of our state as well."



North Farmington band director Carl Gippert as the teen musicians gather on the steps of the White House.

Energy assistance program underway for older adults

Older adults facing difficulty in paying their utility bills this winter should notify their local utility company.

The Michigan Public Service Commission reports that all major state-regulated utility companies are offering assistance to low-income, senior citizens and public assistance recipients.

Senior citizens, age 65 or older, can make application by telephone or in person. The Energy Assistance Program is in its fifth year and covers the period from Dec. 1 through March 31.

The only eligibility requirements

Seniors can apply by telephone or in person

for the senior needing help that he or she be 65 years of age or older and take the first step by contacting the utility company to apply for assistance.

Senior citizens may participate regardless of income. They are not required to make specific payments during the protection period but are encouraged to pay something on the utility bills.

At the end of the protection period, arrangements must be made with the company to pay off the money owed by the start of the next protection period.

Also, the Home Heating Tax Credit offers assistance to low-income seniors with home-heating expenses. Michigan legislators returned to session to do this after the winter holiday to renew this law.

The Michigan Public Service Commission advises anyone with questions about the Energy Assurance Program to call toll free 1-800-292-9555, or 1-800-443-8926 for the hearing impaired.

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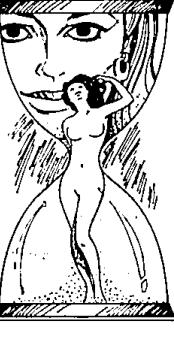
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Mercy Center opens its winter term for swimming and fitness classes Feb. 24. The term extends to April 21 in the center at 28600 11 Mile.

Early morning open swimming is offered 6:30-8:30 a.m. Monday through Friday and 7:30-9 a.m. Saturday.

Lap swimming, swim classes, private lessons and "Adapted Aquatics" for both children and adults are offered.

Directed exercises are offered for slender to heavy adults. In the fitness classes, senior adults are offered discounted fees.

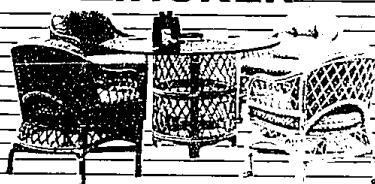
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Inquiries are taken by calling the center, 473-1815.

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