

The men and women of the 45-member King's Park Civic Band near Springfield keep in tune with regular rehe

# Civic bands are alive and playing

## Members come from all walks of life and make all kinds of music

By Sue Mullin *9-6-1978*  
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When a high school band member marches off the football field at that last game during senior year there is, a former bandsman said, a terrible sinking feeling.

This may be the last time an instrumentalist has to get together with a large group to make music. Afterward, horns and drums are placed in their cases and relegated to the attic to gather dust along with yearbooks and other memorabilia.

But a growing number of area people have decided that music is too important to their lives to give up. And happily, for the rest of us as well as the musicians, these men and women have not faded away. They have joined civic bands. At last count there were 20 in the metropolitan area.

It is difficult to imagine what our American holidays would be without these music-makers. A Labor Day or Fourth of July with no band playing the traditional rousing marches? A summer evening in the park with no live romantic music? Unthinkable.

ACCORDING TO Instrumentalist Magazine, a national publication for musicians, civic bands are not vestiges of some bygone era. About 630 such bands are active around the country, almost double the number just a few years ago. Musicians are one of the country's natural resources that is not heading for the endangered species list.

One of the most enterprising in the metropolitan area is the Kings Park Civic Band near Springfield. It started out 13 years ago when neighbors Frank Shirley, Alan Cowart and James Stevens formed a "neighborhood music committee." They

quickly signed up 20 other resident-musicians in the area.

Over the years the effort has burgeoned into a 45-member concert band which plays symphonic, semi-classical, marches and popular tunes, an 18-member dance band and a oom-pah-pah German band called Gemutlichkeit.

So many young people home from college or out of school for the summer wanted to join that the Kings Park Civic Band recently formed a separate summer band for them — called Reunion — a jazz unit directed by Clai Richardson of the Howard University Lab Band.

Dismiss the image of an old-timer dusting off his flute, donning an old uniform three sizes too small and getting up on the platform to play once a year. The Kings Park concert band and its subsidiaries are made up of men and women, mostly in their 30s and 40s. And their ranks include 10 "music-runs-in-the-family" units such as five mother-father-son-daughter combinations.

WHEN THEY'RE NOT making music, members work at all sorts of occupations. Some are housewives, one is a hospital administrator, quite a few are lawyers, one is a photographer for National Geographic magazine and one builds stock cars for a living.

The band's reputation spread at a presto tempo. Some people stepped right up to join after seeing the band perform. Three men, all from the same car pool, were inspired to join after listening to one of the riders — a Kings Park band member — do his weekly Monday morning quarter-backing about his participation in the band. Another member was enlisted at a bus stop. A housewife with three

small children joined, she said, "to get a little peace." Music offers her respite from the exhausting chores of motherhood and puts a little pizzaz into the lives of the mostly desk-bound men.

"It just gets in your blood," said Sam Laudenslager, president of the Kings Park Concert Band. "Most of us played in high school or college. I played with the Redskin Band but wanted to join a group that played all year round."

Most of the band members live in Kings Park, Springfield, Annandale, Lake Braddock, Burke and Fairfax, he said adding "the band has grown rapidly along with the area." But a few who have moved away from the Virginia suburbs — to the District and Bowie, for example — still commute to rehearsals each week at Lake Braddock High School.

IN RETURN for \$400 in annual funding from the King's Park Civic Association, the band plays at the group's spring social and for holiday outdoor concerts. In addition, it plays a major concert each month, says Laudenslager.

Most of the summer concerts are performed in the 400-seat amphitheater at the Burke Center Conservancy in nearby Burke. Weekly, nearly two-hour long practices are held in the band room at the local high school.

The concert band's director, Garwood Whaley, music curricula coordinator for the Arlington Diocesan Schools, is its only paid participant and first professional director. The dance band charges a nominal fee for private parties but Laudenslager said it takes \$3,000 to \$4,000 a year to run the program. "If it weren't for the dance band and the fact that we

See BAND, Page 2



—Washington Star Photographer Bill Wilson

Sam Laudenslager plays lead trombone and is president of the band.

## BAND

**Continued From Page 1**  
play in some other communities for pay, we'd go under."

He explained that just because band members own their instruments and are all volunteers doesn't mean it has no operating expenses. The dance band needed a sound system — which cost about \$1,700. Sheet music is a constant expense because the concert band likes to add more and more numbers to its repertoire. A small cache of money is also needed to cover travel expenses.

**THE BAND** mostly plays local

"gigs," Laudenslager said, but members did go to Ocean City to perform this summer. "Some of us rode the whole way in a trailer and we were the only ones who weren't dragging when we got there," he added, swigging on a hard-earned beer. He had just helped the band set up, and then performed in two concerts on a recent red-hot summer day.

Although band members often play more than one engagement per week in addition to rehearsing, Laudenslager contended they never lose their enthusiasm. "We had a really bad storm out here one rehearsal night and everybody showed up anyway. I don't know what it would take to keep some of us away."