

Marching to a new beat

By **TRAVIS PECK**

— It was hot. Just a shadow past 7:30 in the morning and the thermometer was already touching 80 degrees. In August, Oklahoma nights do little to cool the hot blacktop parking lot near the Claremore High School football field. Still, around 75 regulars showed up for the first two weeks of back-to-school practice for this year's reconstituted Claremore High School Band.

Not a bad number for the end of summer vacation, Band Director Kevin Couch notes.

"We are really happy with that number and see that we have quality among these kids and they are all working hard this early."

Two drum majors were selected last May to lead the "troops" into a new year. The junior drum major, Camerann Fry, a Colorado native that moved to Claremore last year and has played the clarinet for eight years. The senior drum major, Nick Chappell who is working on plans to be a part of the Texas A&M band in another year. For now, both have the same philosophy: "Work hard, play hard and win everything!"

Musical inclination is only part of it. The practice schedule separates the dedicated from the infatuated. Band preparatory practice calls for three and half hours of outside marching and drills and then inside from noon until 3:30 p.m. for fine tuning. The extra effort will pay off later in the school year, Couch believes. And, there's extra incentive this year. Beside local businesses who provide lunch each day so the students can save money on food and gas the Claremore band, band members are mastering music in a first rate learning and practice environment — The Robson Performing Arts Center.

McDonalds, Wal-Mart, Pizza Hut and Subway each provide lunch and with the help of First United Methodist Church there have been plenty of drinks.

"We want to thank all those people for their support this week, and I would like to thank the community for all their support in my first year and now this year," said Couch.

Couch said the newly opened PAC like no other in the area and has boosted morale within the band community — parents and students alike.

One band student's parents owns a U-Haul store and provided a truck to move from the old band room to the PAC.

"One day I said, 'Lets just load it up and get it done', and everyone complied. [The PAC] will be a great asset for these kids and the future of our program. We can't thank Mr. and Mrs. Robson enough," said Couch.

Rod Clark, assistant band director, and John West, percussion technician, round out the band staff. Clark is currently an adjunct teacher, but is hopeful to become a full-time employee as an assistant. West comes to Claremore from the Marines, where he played in the Commanders Drum and Bugle Corp. Ben Spreiter led the color guard to a state title this summer and wants to add another one soon.

The band is already working on their half-time show, which will double as their competition show, for the season. They plan on playing in three or four competitions including the Oklahoma Band Association and Pryor Band Day.

"It is a lot of work getting this many people organized, but when we all have the same goals in mind and see what we can achieve, it is fun," said Couch.

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Photos



Band Director Kevin Couch (above left) goes over the next step in practice with drum majors Nick Chappell and Camerann Fry. Austin Cantrell (from left), Blaire Hines, Richard Hart and Ethan Nickels work on step combinations for the drum line.