



BAND! TEN HUT!

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WITH THOSE WORDS, the Alabama School for the Blind Marching Band was called to attention and marched down Boylston Street in downtown Boston and into Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind history!

Boston, MA is known as a “city of firsts”. The first public garden, Boston Common, was constructed

in 1634 followed by the first public school and first subway system. Then there was the first vaccination and the first telephone. Its newer firsts include Facebook, the first social media network, and closest to our hearts at Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB), the place our own Alabama School for the Blind (ASB) made AIDB history as the first ASB band to march in a parade!

THE BEGINNING

In early 2022, the ASB band accepted a nomination from the Lions Clubs in Alabama to represent Alabama in the Lions Club International Convention Parade of Nations during the summer of 2023. This was a special invitation for the ASB because the Lions Club is known worldwide for improving the lives of visually impaired people and preventing avoidable blindness. No stranger to parades, the ASB has a long history of participating in parades

by riding on a float while they play their instruments. However, with this invitation, the band members knew it was time to show the world what it means to be limitless. “This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity they will always remember, and as a Lion’s member myself, this makes me especially proud for them to have this experience. Mr. Chad Bell, the band director, and the students worked incredibly hard and I enjoyed seeing them march in the parade and their hard work pay off,” said John Mascia, Au.D., President, AIDB.

The ASB band marching down Boylston Street.



I am so proud of our students for their accomplishments and for being selected to represent Alabama in the Lions Club International Parade of Nations.”

— John Mascia, Au.D., President, AIDB

The band took its first steps on the march toward AIDB history at the beginning of the 2022/2023 school year by holding its inaugural summer band camp. Since the students had no marching band experience, Chad Bell, Band and Choral Director, taught the band from scratch. The band started with the basics of marching band fundamentals: how to stand at attention, step off with the correct foot and stay in tempo while marching. The ASB athletic coaching staff also worked with the band and developed an athletic conditioning program to

prepare the students to march several miles in a summertime parade.

Throughout the school year, the ASB band took advantage of every opportunity to practice their performance skills by marching on the field at Alabama School for the Deaf football games, participating in the National Veterans Day Parade in Birmingham, AL, as that parade’s first band with members who are blind and visually impaired and performing at Jazz in the Park at the Orion Amphitheater in Huntsville, AL. “I am so incredibly proud of the efforts of the students this year,” said Bell. “With each performance at venues locally, throughout the great state of Alabama, and around the country, they raise the bar pushing past difficulties to show their limitless nature. Their performances are inspirational!”

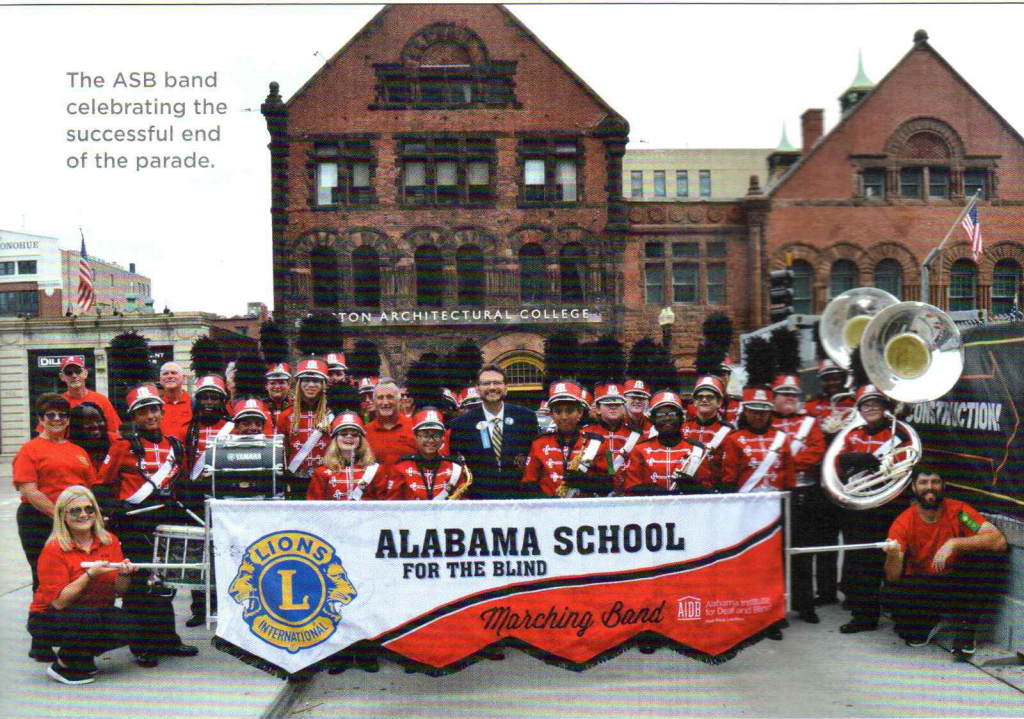


The ASB band utilized sighted guides to provide guidance to students who needed additional support. Pictured is band member Zachary Glasgow, a rising senior, with Gina Dulaney, ASB Guidance Counselor.

A COMMUNITY EFFORT

The employees of AIDB and supporters from around Alabama rallied around the ASB band, holding fundraisers and awarding grants to make the trip possible. As a first-time marching band, the band needed to purchase new band uniforms and instruments designed for use while marching. Two organizations, **the Holle Family Foundation and Alabama's Lions Clubs**, were instrumental in making sure ASB students had this once-in-a-lifetime experience. A generous donation from the Holle

The ASB band celebrating the successful end of the parade.



Family Foundation ensured the band members were ready to make history. “The Holle Family Foundation was established in 2014 to continue the philanthropic commitments of Everett Holle and his family. Everett strongly believed in AIDB and the importance of music,” said Mike Royer, a board of directors member for the Holle Family Foundation and the AIDB Foundation. “When the Landreth Music Building at ASB was dedicated several years ago, Everett was there that day. I remember him smiling and talking about how much he enjoyed the event. Everett truly cared about the students at AIDB and wanted everyone to have the opportunity to enjoy music. He would have been so proud of the students and their accomplishments.”

Lions Clubs throughout Alabama held their own fundraisers to support the ASB band. Right here at home, the Talladega Lions Club held a fundraising event that included an exceptional performance by the ASB band and a silent auction. “The Holle Family Foundation has been a long-time supporter of AIDB and the Alabama Lions Clubs have been a wonderful partner to ASB,” said Becky Watson, Executive Director of the AIDB Office of Institutional Advancement and AIDB Foundation. “We are so grateful for their support and belief in our students.”

HISTORY IS MADE

In the early hours of Monday, July 3, 2023, band members, ASB school staff and sighted guides

boarded the airplane headed to Boston where they would spend the week working hard each morning in marching band practice and enjoying the sights and sounds of Boston every afternoon with trips to Fenway Park for a Boston Red Sox game among many other fun activities.

On Saturday, July 8, 2023, in the heart of historic Boston, MA, a bright summer morning heralded the experience the students had been working for. This highly anticipated event brought together people from around the world to pay homage to the work of Lions Clubs International. Starting at

Boston Common, the ASB marching band was the second group in the parade lineup, including over 150 floats, bands and participants. The ASB band led the way with the lively tunes of “Sweet Home Alabama,” “America the Beautiful,” “This is My Country,” and “God Bless America” echoing through the city’s historic architecture.

“This was a really big leap for me,” said Clara Scelsi, flutist, and rising eighth grader. “I am really honored that I got to play and march in the parade. We put in so much hard work and it feels like a dream has been finally accomplished!” As the parade reached its grand finale near the Hynes Convention Center, the band stopped to perform for the parade’s grand marshals and judges. Not only did the band make AIDB history that day, but they also brought home the Frist Place prize in the Parade of Nations Division 1 High School Bands category! As the last licks of the band’s marching cadence faded away, the true limitless spirit of the ASB band continued to shine with pride and accomplishment.

“This experience has meant more than anything to me,” said Tey Jones, who plays the tenor saxophone and just graduated from ASB. “To get to do this with my people and make history one last time before I leave ASB is amazing! I never thought I’d get to do this. This is a great achievement and I want people to see us and know that kids who are blind can do anything.”