

features

Age is just a number

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Reporter

The year was 2014. The Ashland University football team was set to play their first game of the season against Lake Erie College on a warm September night. Elsewhere in Jack Miller Stadium, 65-year-old Frank Stanek was about to make his debut in the Eagle marching band.

Fast forward to 2019, AU's Nov. 16 game against Northern Michigan will mark 70-year-old Stanek's final hurrah with the university's marching band.

Joining the marching band was never Stanek's intention back in 2014, but after some convincing from the directors and students he accepted the offer; the rest was history.

"I thought they were pulling my leg but they said that they were serious," Stanek said. "So the next marching season I signed up for the marching band and I marched," Stanek said.

His entrance into the marching band was not the first time Stanek had stepped foot on the field with an instrument in hand. He marched while in high school but said that he had not been back on the field since November 1966.

"The hardest part was getting back on the field," Stanek said. "I did it in 2014 and it was not that difficult at all. This time, I don't know if it was the difficulty of the shows or just what it is but I told the kids the first day, 'if you see me screwing up, yell at me.' And boy have they yelled at me."

After growing up in Cleveland, Stanek has almost never stopped going to school.

"I've been going to school all my life. I went to trade school for four years and from there I went into the electrical field and I was constantly taking courses. When I wasn't working a lot of hours I was going to school."

This love of school is what brought him to AU in 2014. He enrolled as a senior citizen and began taking classes under the music performance major to follow his passion of music and band. After finishing his classes in 2017, he still chose to stay involved with the jazz and concert band.

Joseph Lewis Jr., director of the marching band, has only positive things to say about Stanek joining the marching band.

"He comes in motivated. He's just excited to be doing what he's doing and every time I ask him 'how're you doing Frank' his response is always 'oh I'm having a ball,'" Lewis said. "The younger

students really gravitate towards that and he really inspires them a little bit because with his age he's still in there and doing it just like them."

The physicality and time requirement that the marching band demands is ultimately the reason why this is Stanek's last season with the group.

Stanek said that marching band takes up four days a week which forced him to give up playing with three other groups due to time conflicts.

"You can't do everything. This is fun and I enjoy it but it's time for me to go elsewhere and do other things," Stanek said.

Throughout his time with the marching band, he emphasized how the connection with the students is one of the things he has valued the most.

"When I'm out on the field, they don't think of me as old. They think of me as someone that's got to get the heck out of their way so they can do what they gotta do on the field," he said. "There's one young lady who almost daily will walk up by me on the field and say 'get out of the way old man' and



Frank poses in his marching band uniform.

Michaela Wood, values Stanek's presence in the band, but also

him or pick on him more than the others just because of his age

PHOTO SUBMITTED BY: FRANK STANEK



Frank showing off his quirky side while at rehearsal.

PHOTO SUBMITTED BY: MICHAELA WOOD

you know you're accepted when you get treated like that."

Sophomore baritone player,

likes to joke with him whenever possible.

"We like to mess around with

but he's also been a staple in the music department for a while," she said. "He's a very sarcastic person, very funny and he likes to keep the mood light. But at the same time he's also very much willing to help when needed."

Senior trombone player, Kyle Ackert, said that he also cherishes the jokes that Stanek brings to the band. In Ackert's experiences with Stanek, he always makes everyone feel welcome and will talk to anyone to make their day better.

"Some of the best things I hear from Frank is his past and all of the jobs and music he has experienced in the past," Ackert said. "When he tells these stories he goes into so much detail that it's like we were in the same place with him when it happened."

Many of the student participants in the marching band admire Stanek's determination and drive to be a part of the marching band at his age.

"Frank goes out there on the field every day and gives it his all," Ackert said. "He practices like every day is a performance. So having Frank makes me believe that the whole band does

better because of him."

Dr. Scott Garlock, music professor, conductor of the jazz orchestra and former AU marching band director, was Stanek's mentor throughout his time at AU and part of the reason why he became so involved in the various bands on campus.

"It's just cool that he chose to pursue relearning music as a retiree," Garlock said. "The number one market for instruments now is senior citizens, but I'm guessing there are a precious few that have opted to go to classes and play in student collegiate ensembles. Most play in less rigorous ensembles."

Despite Stanek's age, his passion for music pushed him to participate in things that he loves and branch out into others that he had no intention of doing.

"Age is a number. I've been blessed with good health or obviously I couldn't do this, but I can still get out and play with the kids," Stanek said. "There is no such thing as can't. If you wanna do something you just work at it. It may take longer or it may be harder but there's no such word as can't."

Joining the marching band was an unexpected detour for Stanek, but not one that he regrets.

"I had never dreamt that at 70 I'd be out in a marching band. At times it even amazes me that I'm still doing this," he said.

While Stanek's time with the marching band is coming to an end, Lewis emphasized that despite Stanek being an older member, he is still such a valuable piece of the puzzle.

"We have four more games and then the season is over," Stanek said. "But then I'll transfer right into symphonic band and concert band. I do what I can and I have succeeded as well as I have because I've had help from the kids. I could not have done what I have without their help."



Frank and other members of the marching band during a performance.

PHOTO SUBMITTED BY: FRANK STANEK