

Walkersville band hits high note

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Dec. 11, 2003

JoAnne McArdle was just doing what she always did for the Walkersville High music department when she walked into Wal-Mart on Monocacy Boulevard a few months ago -- looking for ways to raise funds for the school's music program, which has a budget of \$35,000.



Bill Ryan/The Gazette

The former WHS Band Booster fund-raising coordinator never dreamed her trip to the store would end in one of the music department's most successful fund-raisers to date.

Walkersville High School chorus members sing holiday songs at Wal-Mart on Monocacy Boulevard on Monday night, prior to finding out the school's music program won \$6,700 from a contest sponsored by Coca-Cola and Wal-Mart.

During that visit, LuAnn Morris, the store's good works community coordinator, informed McArdle about the Coca-Cola Football Town USA High School Challenge being sponsored by Coca-Cola and Wal-Mart, that could lead to a \$6,500 grand prize.

At a minimum, the group would receive \$200 just for participating in the contest, which included making a display that utilized Coke products and promoted school spirit.

Since the music program only gets about \$2,000 from the school's budget, McArdle said, the contest was a great way to earn more money.

The catch was the booster club only had four days to put an entry together.

About 19 members of the 55-member marching band and a handful of parents met the challenge, which resulted Monday night in a \$6,700 pay off.

Band and choir members and their parents gathered around Morris at the store's snack bar as she unwrapped an oversized check and, with tears in her eyes, declared Walkersville High one of 10 grand-prize winners nationwide -- out of a pool of about 660 entries.

"It's awesome," McArdle said. "It's hard to believe, even though, deep down, I knew we could do it. We would have been thrilled with anything."

Winners were selected on a point system that included 10 points for

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using Coke products in the display with an additional point for using Vanilla Coke; five points for using school materials; five points for each additional school activity held as part of the contest; and one point for media coverage of the events.

The contest needed to include a football theme, said Tara Woolley, 16, a junior who plays piccolo in Walkersville's band.

"We looked at the marching band side of football," she said.

Using 12-packs of Sprite, the group created a football field, with Dasani water bottles as band members and a Vanilla Coke color guard in true pre-game formation, said 16-year-old Siobhan McArdle, who plays the piccolo and bass drums for the band.

The school's entry remained on display in the store's lobby from mid-September until mid-October, said Denny Woolley, Tara's father and one of the masterminds behind the entry.

"We used to come in just to watch people's reactions when they saw it," said Chris Woolley, Tara's mother and band booster member.

In addition to the display, the group held a car wash and bake sale at the store. Morris captured the activities in a scrapbook, which she submitted as part of the school's entry.

The prize money not only benefits the marching band, but the entire music program, said David Franceschina, band and choir director. Franceschina said he would have been thrilled with \$1,000, never imagining that the school would win the grand prize.

"Denny and JoAnne started us out and the kids jumped right in," Franceschina said.

"It was the most fun we've ever had raising money," McArdle said.