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Pride of Salem off to parade

By [Shawna Morrison](#)

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Jim Paxton carefully watched and listened to the students in his symphonic band class Monday afternoon, stopping them every few seconds to offer pointers.

"It's got to be dut-dut-dut-dut," he yelled, making his class repeat the sound before playing it on their instruments.

With only days to go before Salem High School's marching band plays in the inaugural parade for Gov.-elect Tim Kaine, Paxton doesn't have time to waste.

He found out just three weeks ago that the 122-member band he directs had been invited to Colonial Williamsburg to be part of Saturday's parade.

"It's pretty cool," said mellophonist Michelle Fame, a sophomore. "It's kind of an honor to be able to play for something that big with so many people that are going to be there."

The band, known as The Pride of Salem, will be one of 40 groups participating in the parade, but the only high school group from Western Virginia.

"Out of all the high schools in the state, it's pretty amazing" that Salem was chosen, said drum major Jason Malone, a senior.

Paxton had applied for the honor Dec. 5 but didn't want to spend time practicing a piece for the parade unless his band was chosen.

Because Salem High's band played in Gov. Mark Warner's inaugural parade four years ago, Paxton was surprised the band was chosen again.

"I was very pleased," he said. "We pride ourselves on representing the city of Salem, Salem High School and the Roanoke Valley.

"For this group of kids, it'll be a once-in-a-lifetime experience."

As they practiced Monday in the high school's band room -- a room where three of the four walls are lined with trophies -- most students said they aren't nervous about the parade, even though it's such a high-profile event.

"I've been doing this for four years. I'm not nervous anymore," said clarinetist Erica Davis, a senior.

Besides, she said, preparing for a parade is "easier than doing a 10-minute show." Instead of having to set up for a show, "all you have to do is take your horn and go."

"Parades are more fun and a lot of people are there," said bass clarinetist Whitney Clark, a freshman.

The band has practiced marching since August and has played in several parades in the last few months -- Salem's Christmas Parade, the school's homecoming parade, and one parade at Walt Disney World's Magic Kingdom and one at Universal Studios in Florida over winter break.

"Now we've just got to switch our gears to this music," Paxton said.

Students have until Wednesday to memorize the music for Tom Wallace's "America."

After school Thursday, the entire marching band will practice the 1-minute, 54-second piece together -- for the first time.

Students in Paxton's symphonic, percussion, concert and jazz band classes all take part in the band, but "it's very difficult to get all of them scheduled for one class," he said.

Students usually don't rehearse marching band music in class, instead studying things like concert literature and technique.

Paxton said he made an exception "because it's such a unique opportunity and we're sort of time-restricted."

All but seven band members will make the trip to Williamsburg on Friday night so that they'll be in place by 10 a.m. Saturday.

Paxton said he hasn't been told where in the parade the Salem band will be.

The parade is scheduled to start about 1 p.m., after Kaine's noon inauguration ceremony. The parade route is more than a mile long.

Even with only a few days left to practice, students said they

feel confident that they'll be ready.

"I know that if we've practiced long enough and hard enough, that we'll be fine," said clarinetist Emily Hayslett, a sophomore.

"I think we still need to work on the music a little more but I think we will be ready," said contra clarinetist Russell Dunbar, a senior.

"Not only do we enjoy playing music, we also like to play music for other people to hear."

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