City of Alexandria Pipes and Drums

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The City of Alexandria Pipes and Drums play in Grade 4 of EUSPBA and are the Official Band of the City of Alexandria, Virginia USA.

Alexandria's pipe band can trace its beginning to 1971, when a small group of pipers and drummers began playing together in Alexandria. Fortunately, the Tourist Council, and several prominent businessmen, took an interest in the group, and were instrumental in obtaining city sponsorship for a pipe band as an appropriate way to celebrate Alexandria's strong Scottish heritage. The City of Alexandria Pipes and Drums was formally organized early in 1972. As questions are often asked about the band's tartan, some comments on that subject may be of interest. Since the city was named for John Alexander, an early landowner, and Alexander is a sept of the MacAlister clan, the MacAlister tartan was an obvious choice for the band. When kilts were ordered, however, it was found that this tartan was not available in the required weight, so another choice had to be made. It was recalled that Lord Fairfax, who owned much of northern Virginia in colonial times, was also Baron of Cameron, a parish in Scotland. Cameron tartan was then chosen for the band, to the delight of Louis Robert, the band's chief patron, who was also known locally as The Mayor of Cameron Street. In 1973 the band settled in to what would become a yearly round of parades and Scottish games, supplemented by a variety of other performances. Over the years these have included concerts, garden parties, balls, banquets, horse races, conventions, commencement exercises, wedding receptions, and church services. In 1982 the band played for the Governor's inaugural ball, and in 1987 performed at the White House for President Reagan in celebration of St. Patrick's Day. There was even a performance as warm up band for a Rod Stewart rock concert, probably the only indoor performance where the audience was not startled by the volume of the pipes and drums. Every pipe band seems to develop a character if its own. Some bands exist primarily to compete with others at Scottish games, while others never compete. Some pay close attention to dress and deportment while others consider anything other than the music as superfluous. The Alexandria band has maintained the middle-of-the-road approach adopted in its early years. The band competes at Scottish games several times each year in an effort to improve its musical standard, yet parades and other public performances, where there are apt to be few piping experts in attendance, are also taken very seriously. In an effort to balance a democratic approach with the authority needed to run the band, periodic elections are held for the post of Pipe Major. At present there are three former pipe majors in the band, happily supporting the present holder of the position, John Gustafson. Often, after a performance in Old Town Alexandria, tourists will ask, Are you from Scotland? Band members then explain that they are just more-or-less normal people who play bagpipes or drums as a hobby. Not surprisingly, such people are often in short supply. Because of the area's large transient population the band is constantly losing old members and gaining new ones. Where needed, newcomers to piping are offered special attention to aid in developing the skill needed to join the band. Thus, over the years, through the efforts of a core of veteran members the musical standard as well as the size of the band has shown a steady improvement.

Grouping: Pipeband
City: Alexandria
State: VA
Zip: 22003
Country: US
Year-Joined: 2012
UL Rank (1 is highest, 4 is lowest): 4

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