DCFD Emerald Society Pipes and Drums

http://www.dcfdpipesanddrums.org/

Pipes and Drums of the Washington DC Fire Department's Emerald Society.

The formation of a DC fire service pipe band was the dream of members of the Emerald Society Firefighters of Washington for many years. The DC Emerald Society was founded in 1979 by such Irish names as Murphy, Kelly, Flaherty, Healy, Rielley, McCoy, McClafferty, Dinkle, Harrington and Jones. While Emerald Societies were in existence in New York City since the early 1950¡s, the influx of New Yorkers to the DC ranks in the late 1970¡s raised the question why don¡t we have an Emerald Society of our own in DC? Hard working members answered this question by creating a successful Fire Emerald Society in the nation¡s capital. Fraternal, family and charity events were soon organized, and uniformed members representing the DC Fire Department were seen up and down the East coast, and in Ireland as well. Soon after the Emerald Society question was answered came the next tough question, why don¡t we have a fire service pipe band? The formation of a pipe band is a difficult thing, and as any band member will tell you, it requires a significant amount of talent, time, effort and money. Attempts in the late 1980s and 1990s were unsuccessful. It was the tragic events around September 11 that would serve as a catalyst for this most recent and successful attempt. Members watched the sincere devotion of the musician-firefighters of the New York City Fire Department Pipes & Drums as they served at 343 funerals to honor their own, including Durell ¡Bronko¬ Pearsall, a drummer in their band, and Father Mychal Judge, the band¡s Chaplin. The call was heard again, and this time it was answered. In February 2002, approximately 40 DC firefighters turned out for the first band practice. Under the leadership of Capt. Henry Welsh (3T11-2) and Lt. Bob Purdy (3T2-4) the initiative gained momentum. Instruction was volunteered by Mark O¡Donnell, a Grade I piper who had played with the championship City of Washington Pipe Band, and Tom Hayden, a Prince Georges County Battalion Fire Chief and snare drummer in the Prince Georges Police Pipe Band. Lt. Dave Hollinger (3E30-3) assumed the important job of Band Manager, and all of the members stepped up to meet the challenge of forming a pipe band in just one year. The membership of the DCFD Emerald Society band is distinctive in that all members are active or retired DC firefighters ranging from those recently graduated from the Training Academy through some retired from service for twenty years. With encouragement and the generous gift of a bass drum from brother firefighters in the Dublin Fire Brigade Pipes & Drums, the fire departments of two nations¡ capitals highlighted the connection between these two cities and countries, and also recognized the ethnic heritage claimed by a significant number of American firefighters. After much searching, the Inglis Tartan was selected for our uniform kilt. The colors of this beautiful tartan are important to the members as they nearly match those of the DCFD uniform patch, but there is also a deeper and more meaningful significance. The Red and White stripes on a Blue field are the colors of our American flag, whose nation's capital we protect. The Green background represents the color of Ireland, our heritage. The Gold stripe is a reminder of the long line of DC firefighters who have served the city and it's citizens before us. On the left shoulder, the band wears the previous DCFD uniform patch that had been retired by the Department. This older patch is worn by the band as a sign of tradition in the fire service and in respect to the many who served wearing this emblem. On the right shoulder, the band wears our own custom patch in the shape of a Maltese cross, the symbol of firemen, with an American flag and shamrock encircled by a Celtic belt, a symbol of family. The gold metallic badge worn on the band glengarries and sporrans is cast from the traditional service badge given to DC firefighters with the addition of the words ¡Emerald Society¬ for our patron organization. The original F.D.D.C. dress uniform button is affixed in the center where the firefighter¡s individual badge number was once set. P/M Henry Welsh designed both the band patch and badge with contributions from artist-snare drummer-F/F Joey Baka (3E11-1). Uniforms and instruments were purchased from Scotland to the tune of nearly $50,000. Some fundraising efforts were successful, but the largest expense of purchasing equipment went to the band members themselves. Many of the members also arranged trades, or substitutes, to stand in for them so they didn¡t miss any practices in this important first year. After almost a year of weekly Monday practices, with some additional Saturdays as well, the band stepped off in the 2003 Belmar, New Jersey St. Patrick¡s Day Parade. As the kilts had not yet arrived, the band marched wearing their Class A uniform trousers, which worked well as the weather was in the high 20¡s with freezing rain and sleet. As hoped, the band persevered through their first performance in the worst of weather conditions and successfully completed the parade to the enjoyment of the onlookers. The band made its official debut in the 2003 Washington DC St. Patrick¡s Day parade down Constitution Avenue in an unseasonably warm, and un-typically rain-less day, further proof that God loves His firefighters. Fifteen pipes and fourteen drummers performed on this glorious day, all of whom shared the same great feeling of pride in the accomplishments they had achieved to form a pipe band in just one year. The band has been much in demand with additional performances at the MCI Arena during the intermission of a Washington Capitals hockey game, and a concert at the Australian Embassy to mark their Armed Forces Memorial Day. The second training class of 24 piping and drumming students started in March. The band has much work to continue the improvements started just a year ago, but moves forward with the strong confidence it has shown to make it thus far. The history of the band is yet to be written, but it is the wish of our members as our motto reads to Honor, Remember, Represent and Celebrate. DC has a fire service pipe band of which it¡s Fire Department and citizens can be proud. A new tradition is born in Washington, DC.

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