

Chippewa Falls has lost a legend in Doug Greenhalgh

by Tom Arneberg, Community Columnist (and band parent)
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"Kids, no matter what happens tonight, I want you to always remember this moment. You will have this moment for the rest of your lives."

Those were the prophetic words of Chi-Hi Band Director Doug Greenhalgh Saturday night in Whitewater. He was referring to the judges' scores that they would hear later -- even if the points weren't what they expected, they were proud of performing at their absolute peak.

But his words turned out to have deeper meaning. They were his last words to the band as a group.

His "kids" -- 173 hard-working teen musicians in the "Marching Cardinals" of Chippewa Falls' Senior High School -- had just come off the field from an amazing performance in the state marching band competition at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater.

They did that night what they do following every performance after leaving the bright lights -- they stood in a circle with their arms around each others' necks, swaying together, and softly singing the "Marching Cardinals Song":

*As we stand here all together,
Pride fills all our hearts.
As we think about our friendships
Though some day we'll part.*

This night it felt even sweeter than usual. Band parents Tracey Robb and Esther Pedigo told me that the band's performance at the competition was simply stunning; better than they have ever seen. The kids put out so much energy and emotion on the field that it was palpable.

Indeed, the scores proved them right. The band earned a sky-high score of 88 points -- enough for a remarkable third-place trophy in Wisconsin's toughest division, AAAA. This literally was the best that this group had ever done in state competition.

Their results did not surprise me. With a son in the band, I have been watching them for two years now, and their performance at the last Chi-Hi home game Thursday night was equally amazing. Those who were at Dorais Field that night know what I'm talking about -- I believe it was the finest marching band performance that I have seen in my life.

How can a school in a town the size of Chippewa Falls pull this off against big-budget schools near Milwaukee and Madison? A lot of people put in countless hours of hard work, but at the heart of it is the vision, charisma and leadership of one man.

In the entertainment industry, a few people attain such success that they are known by only one name -- "Cher," "Madonna," "Prince."

At Chi-Hi, Greenhalgh had such influence that he was known by only one *LETTER*. Walk up to any student, faculty, or staff, and ask them about "G," and they'll know exactly whom you're talking about. Actually, any Chi-Hi graduate from the last twenty years would know.

Sure, G was "just a teacher." Sort of like Brett Favre is "just a football player." One difference between the two is that at 36 years old, Brett Favre is nearing the end of his useful life as a quarterback. On the other hand, G, at 48, was still getting better with each season.

He had a lot of great years left. Or so we all thought before Sunday morning's tragic accident.

After last year's fifth place finish, G asked a group of parents if we thought his philosophy was right. Schools that score better in marching band competition usually have strict audition procedures, and often allow only juniors and seniors on the field.

But we endorse G's marching band policy: anyone who wants to join is in -- all grades, all abilities. They just have to be willing to work hard. In fact, all freshman band members are **REQUIRED** to endure the rigors of marching band.

This policy means that the marching band has to start over every year with a brand new group of freshman. But those 14- and 15-year-olds quickly get caught up in the excitement and work ethic of the group.

Superintendent Mike Schoch said in a Monday morning press conference that G has "created a program that is second to none. His energy, enthusiasm and caring made a big difference in students' lives. He is going to be very hard -- impossible -- to replace."

Before going to bed Sunday night, I asked my son Ben for all the words to the song they sing together after every performance:

Marching Cardinals Song

*As we stand here all together,
Pride fills all our hearts.
As we think about our friendships
Though some day we'll part.*

*Sound the trumpets, marching onward
To the beating drum.
All the good times we'll remember,
Forever Cardinal bound.*

*Starting out with new faces
Together we become
Chi-Hi's finest Marching Cardinals,
Achieving goals as one.*

*Sound the trumpets, marching onward
To the beating drum.
All the good times we'll remember,
Forever Cardinal bound.*

I think it's safe to say that every student and parent in Whitewater Saturday night will honor Greenhalgh's last request. They will, indeed, remember that moment for the rest of their lives.

Some day it will be a joyful memory. For now, the pain is just too searing.

Chippewa Falls has lost a legend.

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(Read updates about the crash and see thousands of photos of the Marching Cardinals at www.cfma.info.)

