

## Alumni Spotlight March 2020



**NAME:** Kathleen (McDonald) Amabile '09, Bachelor of Science in Music Education (Clarinet)

**HOMETOWN:** Grew up in Swarthmore, PA (Ridley HS, Class of 2005)

**WHY WCU:** Excellent reputation for music education

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### What made you go into the degree you chose?

I had excellent music teachers in my home school district (Ridley). I was very active in my school's band program and was sure by the time I was in middle school that I wanted to become a band director.

### What is your official title and what are your responsibilities in your current position?

Band Director, Grades 5-12 at Elk Lake School District (Springville, PA)

Current responsibilities include instructing all instrumental ensembles and group lessons for grades 5-12, as well as the elective Music Theory, Music History, and Jazz Improvisation courses. Extracurricular responsibilities include directing the summer marching band, conducting the pit band for the fall musical, as well as serving as Department Chair for the Fine Arts Department. Prior responsibilities have included instructing general music classes for grades K-6, Life Skills music classes, Junior High Chorus, and 8th grade General Music, as well as serving as a Senior High Class Advisor.

I also serve in the following professional roles: Clarks Summit University (Clarks Summit, PA)- Adjunct Saxophone & Woodwind Methods Instructor and Marywood University (Scranton, PA)- Interim Adjunct Clarinet Instructor.

### What is a typical day like at work?

On any given day, I can be found walking (or sometimes running) back and forth between our high school and elementary buildings (our district is all under one roof!) to teach my various grade levels. I have ensemble and sectional rehearsals every day, 3 days a week I also teach our music history elective for high school students, which is a great way for me to connect with students that may not already be involved in the school's music program. I am happy to work with students that would like extra lesson times before or after school when necessary as well. I get lots of steps in during the day- my average tends to be 12,000 by the time I leave work in the afternoon!

### What have been the biggest challenges at work?

I think it can be a struggle for music teachers to keep their work and personal lives balanced. There are always rehearsals to be planned, lessons to teach, festivals to attend- it can feel never-ending and overwhelming if not approached with the right attitude. However, with the correct amount of healthy boundaries and self care, you will find yourself thriving rather than surviving.

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### What do you enjoy most about your current position?

I have my students for 8 years of their academic life if they are in band from 5th grade until graduation. That's longer than any other teacher in the district, which is a responsibility that I do not take lightly. It is so rewarding to watch them grow as musicians and as people during the years that they spend with me. I teach them how to make their first sounds on their instruments, and a few years later we are having conversations about choosing colleges and the plans that they have for their future. I do not have children of my own; however, my seniors sure do feel like my "kids" when I watch them walk across the stage at graduation each year.

### What skills, talents, and other traits are useful and necessary to do your job?

Aside from the necessary musical abilities that you must have to be a band director, I believe that it is crucial to have an understanding of how students think and function. It's not just about music- we need to understand how to connect with young people to help them reach their full potential in life. Flexibility, self-awareness, kindness, and a sense of humor are also a requirement for long lasting success and fulfillment in this profession as well!

### Do you have a favorite or funny story about work?

I still laugh until I cry when I recount the story of the year that I taught K-6 general music and a Kindergartener stuck his tongue out at me and gave me the thumbs down when I didn't pick him for a turn at a game that we were playing. That memory will never escape me!

### What do you enjoy doing in your free time?

I enjoy spending time with my husband and the rest of my family, volunteering at the local animal shelter, reading, and exercising.

### Where do you see yourself in five years?

Continuing to build the music program in my district, while remaining active in the Music Educators Association and possibly entering a doctoral program. Personally, I would like to see my husband and I in our dream house with some dogs!

### What advice would you give to a current student who aspires to follow in your footsteps and pursue a similar career path?

Take every opportunity afforded to you and work as hard as you can. Surround yourself with peers and mentors that value high achievement and learn as much as possible from them. When it comes time to look for a job, be willing to relocate or do something outside of your perceived comfort zone- it's important to get that experience! Keep learning and growing- you will never know everything. Further your education through graduate programs, attend conferences, and make it a priority to continue performing!

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### How has your WCU education contributed to your success?

I always remember that the street light banners on campus said "WCU- Expect Excellence". The high standards that the music students are held to was instrumental in my success post graduation. My professors inspired me to want to become the best educator that I can possibly be. I will always be grateful for the education that I received at WCU, and it is something that I am very proud of.

### What do you consider to be your greatest accomplishments (both personally and professionally)?

My greatest professional accomplishments were only possible as a result from my personal ones. I picked up and moved to a different part of the state right after graduating from WCU when I was offered my first (and current job) in 2009. I didn't know a soul, and relocating to a rural area after spending my entire life in suburban Philadelphia was something! It was scary, and lonely at first, but also very worth it. I was hired in an excellent school district that has been wonderful to me since day one. Since then, I have married the love of my life and we bring out the best in each other every day. I have worked through two masters programs and continue to build the band program at my school. I am eager to share my passion for teaching in rural schools by presenting at the Pennsylvania State Music Educators State Conference in April of this year. I feel very blessed for all that I have in my life and I never take it for granted.

### What's your favorite memory from when you were a student at WCU?

My years in marching band and Wind Ensemble under the director of Dr. Andrew Yozviak, of course! And post graduation, it has been such a joy to go back and participate in Alumni Band at homecoming, as well as performing with the Ram Band at the Eagles Playoff Game on January 5, 2020! From age 18 until now, there is nothing like the feeling of performing the melody of the Alma Mater ("West Chester, Hail all Hail!) in front of thousands of people.