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THURSDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2010

The Seattle Times

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Marching to London

The huge Mercer Island High marching band, which is open to pretty much any student who can play, has been selected to perform in the New Year's Parade in London.



PHOTOS BY MIKE SIEGEL / THE SEATTLE TIMES

The Mercer Island High School marching band, practicing in a street near the high school this week, is not only going to London, but also the 2012 Rose Parade in Pasadena, Calif.

BY NICOLE TSONG
Seattle Times Eastside reporter

For three chilly days this week, the Mercer Island High School marching band walked stiff-legged down suburban streets, students poker-faced, instruments held in rigid arms. Their band director wove through their ranks, shouting advice.

"I don't want to hear your feet. Place the heel!" said director Parker Bixby. "Eyes off the ground. Look proud!"

On New Year's Day, all the hard work during winter break will be worth it. The roughly 200 students are scheduled to fly to London for the invite-only New Year's Day Parade through Piccadilly Circus and historic Trafalgar Square. There, they will hear their name announced to crowds reaching

half a million as they show off choreographed dance moves while playing Emerson, Lake & Palmer's "Karn Evil 9."

It's enough to make every student want to join band.

At Mercer Island High, roughly one in five students do. The band doesn't discriminate: anyone who meets minimum playing requirements can join. Of the 300 in the marching band, about 200 sophomores, juniors, seniors and numerous chaperones will make it to London.

See > BAND, A11

WEB EXTRA

London, here they come
See more photos, plus video, of the Mercer Island High School band's preparations: seattletimes.com



Band director Parker Bixby says Mercer Island is a "special place to teach and be a student."

Obama savors year-end victories



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

President Obama signs the repeal of the "don't ask, don't tell" policy.

HE CALLS LAME-DUCK SESSION 'MOST PRODUCTIVE' IN DECADES

'Tough fights' expected next year

BY PAUL WEST AND PETER NICHOLAS
Tribune Washington bureau

WASHINGTON—Seven weeks after using the word "shellacking" to describe his political condition, President Obama left for his annual Hawaiian vacation in a vastly different place, with a litany of accomplishments and his party seizing the high ground on issues relating to civil rights, national security and the Sept. 11 attacks.

At his first news conference since the day after midterm elections, in which Republicans won control of the House, Obama claimed Wednesday he had heard the message of that vote: Seek common ground.

"That's a message I will take to heart in the new year, and I hope my Democratic and Republican friends will do the same," he said.

Bipartisan deals formed the basis of much of the legislation passed in a lame-duck session Obama called "the most productive" in decades. Hours earlier, the Senate passed the New START arms-reduction treaty by a bipartisan vote of 71-26.

That vote was preceded in recent days by bipartisan passage of other landmark legislation, including repeal of the "don't ask, don't tell" law affecting gays in the military, an \$858 billion tax-cut deal and the largest

Wednesday's developments

New START

The Senate, on a 71-26 vote, ratified a nuclear-arms treaty with Russia.

Military gay ban

President Obama signed a bill that repeals the "don't ask, don't tell" law.

9/11 health bill

Both houses approved \$4.3 billion in additional aid for responders to the Sept. 11 attacks in New York.

111TH CONGRESS: the most prolific since at least the '60s > Close-up A3

Census decline brings sigh in Michigan

POPULATION | The state's loss is having a psychic effect on residents who blame the shift in manufacturing, a "terrible" business climate and politicians.

BY MONICA DAVEY
The New York Times

CONSTANTINE, Mich. — While every other U.S. state gained population over the past decade, Michigan shrank. And yet, as word seeped across frozen towns like this one Wednesday, almost no one seemed even mildly surprised. This was, many here said with resignation, just one last, official confirmation of Michigan's long, grim

and gloomy slide. "We used to enjoy a bit of a strut," said Jerry Becker, a welder, recalling an era when Michigan's automotive powerhouses ruled the world and salaries here felt lavish. "But that's long gone. We all know by now that everybody thinks of Michigan as a bad place to live — a place that doesn't seem to have much of a future."

See > MICHIGAN, A12



CARLOS OSORIO / THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

This vacant house, near City Airport in Detroit, is in what was once a thriving neighborhood.



Republican Chris Vance
Democrat Christian Sinderman

Fight song of UW alumni to grow louder in Olympia

MOBILIZING GRADS TO ADVOCATE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

New group hires 2 political heavyweights

BY KATHERINE LONG
Seattle Times higher education reporter

With state funding for higher education on the chopping block again, the University of Washington's alumni have formed a group to try to harness Husky power to fight for higher-education support.

The new group, UW Impact, hopes

to mobilize a "sleeping giant" — the 300,000 alumni of the UW — to get more involved in state politics.

UW Impact has also hired two heavy hitters, one from each side of the political aisle: Chris Vance, former chairman of the state Republican Party, and Christian Sinderman, a well-known Democratic consultant. The two (who

are not UW grads) are paid political consultants, as well as members of the organization's leadership team.

UW Impact is a nonprofit, not a political-action committee. It won't back candidates or lobby the Legislature. And although it's concerned about the state budget, "our vision is much bigger" than that, says Vance. See > UW, A10

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