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Lakota West band honors WW II vets in parade

By **Abbie Finfrock**
Enquirer staff writer

WEST CHESTER TWP. - For Joe Witt, 87, returning to Hawaii doesn't make him think about sandy beaches and gorgeous sunsets. He is reminded of Dec. 7, 1941, when the Japanese attacked his training unit at Pearl Harbor.

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Witt and his wife, Judy, returned to the Navy Yard there this week with the Lakota West High School Marching Band, which will play Thursday in the Waikiki Thanksgiving Holiday Parade in Honolulu.

The band, which has been planning the trip for the past year, invited Witt and paid his way as a tribute for serving in World War II.

"I am not a very emotional person. But when they asked me to go along as a tribute to local World War II veterans in the area, it was the closest I've ever been," said Witt, who is vice chairman of the Ohio State Pearl Harbor Survivors Association and president of Chapter 8 of Pearl Harbor Veterans in Cincinnati.

The Lakota West band will perform "A Day in Infamy" during the parade as a tribute to World War II war servicemen at Pearl Harbor.

"When I heard them practice, the music sent chills through my body. The hair even went up on my arms. The feeling is overwhelming," Witt said.

The Marching Firebirds are one of 20 bands that will participate in the parade. The parade route travels approximately 1.5 miles through Waikiki along the oceanfront on Kalakaua Avenue.

"They have put years of hard work into this. They are three-time grand champions, have supported the football team, marched in many local parades and have done tons of fund-raising. They deserve it," said Greg Snyder, the band director.

Students will also visit the battleship USS Missouri, the USS Arizona Memorial and Pearl Harbor, where they also will perform.

With 315 members, the Firebirds are the largest marching band in Ohio, Snyder said.

. An additional 128 family members, followers and chaperones left Cincinnati with 235 members of the band on Sunday.

While most of the band member's families are footing the \$2,000-per-person bill, the band has raised a significant amount from supporters in fund-raisers.

For some seniors, this is holiday trip No. 2. In 2002, they played in New Orleans at the Sugar Bowl.

E-mail afinfrock@enquirer.com