

# The Rapid City Ranger Band

## A Historical Perspective

The Rapid City Ranger Band was first formed in the early 1950's at the request of the City of Rapid City to march one parade in Rapid City during the summer. During the early years, the Ranger Band was connected with the Rapid City Municipal Band and the directors and students from Rapid City High School were the original members of the group. In 1959 the Rapid City Chamber of Commerce proposed to the City of Rapid City the formation of a paid marching band made up of local high school musicians to perform at the Black Hills area festivals and the Rapid City summer parades. The City of Rapid City acknowledged the vision and passed a statute establishing the funding for the Rapid City Ranger Band. The director of the band during the early 1960's was Owen Noxon who was the director of bands at Rapid City High School. During the mid-1960's Russell Mettler who was then the director of bands at West Junior High School took over the band and continued to direct the group until the early 1980's. Following Mr. Mettler's retirement, Sheldon Anderson became the director for a few years as did Calvin Hofer, both assistant band directors at Central High School. Since Calvin Hofer's departure from the school district to attend graduate school in 1989, the band has been directed by Don Downs, director of bands at Stevens High School.

During the 1960's and 1970's the band was considered part of the City Parks and Recreation Department. The musicians and directors were at that time considered employees of the City of Rapid City, were paid directly from the City and received a W-2 form for tax purposes. Directors were instructed to submit their budget requests directly to the city finance office each year for funding. This process continued until 1981 when the City determined that the complexities of tax reporting, pension programs and the changes to the workman's compensation rules made it unfeasible to continue. Beginning in 1982, the City decided to make a flat grant to the band based on the budget request presented to the City finance office to cover its operational expenses. This change in effect made the directors and musicians independent contractors and no longer direct employees of the City. During this period, the City hired Lowell Holmgren to act as the finance officer for the Municipal Band and the Ranger Band. Lowell was charged with distributing the payroll for both groups and filing paperwork with the government. Additional changes took place in 1996 when the city council decided to have the funds for the groups funded through municipal statute distributed by the Allied Arts Fund. These groups included the Rapid City Ranger Band, Municipal Band, Minnelusa Museum, Dakota Choral Union and the Black Hills Symphony Orchestra.

The Budget for the Ranger Band is made up of the following areas: transportation needs, music and uniform expenses, and salaries of the musicians and director. As far back as 1987, the budget to cover the operational expenses and salaries of the band was \$7,410.00 per year. The Ranger Band budget has increased over the years to this year's amount of \$10,300.00 to cover the usual increases associated with

inflation. In addition, the number of musicians has also been increased from 46 in 1987 to 55 today mainly due to the larger buses available through Gray Line of the Black Hills.

Tourism has a major impact in Rapid City and the Black Hills area during the summer months. Each of the major cities in the Black Hills area celebrates an event each year to draw attention to its community. Over the years, the Ranger Band has been able to help support events such as the Optimists Kiddie Parade, the Presidents Day parade and the Central States Fair Parade in Rapid City. Throughout the Black Hills, the band has acted as musical ambassadors for the City of Rapid City supporting events such as the Round-up Days in Belle Fourche, the Heart of the Hills Celebration in Hill City, Gold Discovery Days in Custer, the Days of 76 in Deadwood, The State American Legion Parade in Spearfish, and the Miss South Dakota Pageant parade in Hot Springs. The City of Rapid City is greatly admired by the community leaders of the Black Hills for the generosity and interest shown their events by providing the one thing which is the most difficult for them to organize: a live marching band for their parade. These special events have changed over the years but still today help provide a reason for tourists to come to the Black Hills and a reason to spend time in the area and Rapid City.

The Rapid City Ranger Band has fulfilled the vision set forth by the City Council in the early 1950's to help make summer parades in the Black Hills outstanding and memorable events for the thousands of city residents and tourists who visit each year. We hope the information provided helps clarify the bands 52 year history since 1959 and its relationship and connection with the City. We truly appreciate the city council's annual support for the Rapid City Ranger Band and hope we can continue to serve the community of Rapid City.

Sincerely,  
Don Downs  
Rapid City Ranger Band Director  
Phone: 341-7017  
Cell: 431-8295  
Email: [dmadowns@yahoo.com](mailto:dmadowns@yahoo.com)