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First student in PBHS history to be Named to National FFA Band

SEPTEMBER 19TH 2024 BY DEE LOFLIN

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A student has been chosen to be a member of the National FFA Band for the first time in the history of Poplar Bluff High School since the local chapter of the leadership development organization was chartered in 2002, confirmed advisers of past and present.

PBHS sophomore Preston Ethridge has been selected to perform among 100 students across the United States, and six total in Missouri, to play trumpet Wednesday through Saturday, Oct. 23-26, during the 97th annual National FFA Convention & Expo in Indianapolis.

"There are over one million FFA members nationwide [representing] the largest youth organization in the world," stated PBHS agriculture instructor Mike Melson, FFA adviser. "Out of a million members, they pick 100 of those who tryout to be chosen for the band. As a sophomore, that's just crazy unheard of."

Preston, a section leader for the Sho-Me Marching Band, will perform "and help bring full instrumental balance to the band" several times including at Lucas Oil Stadium, the Artsgarden and various special awards functions, according to a National FFA press release. To be considered, he submitted a video audition and application over the summer and was notified of his placement last month.

"He is a very hard worker and is a very reliable member of the band," commented Junior and Senior High music teacher Stephen Winters, the band director, noting that Preston placed in the Southeast Missouri All-District Band last year as a freshman.

He will arrive in advance to rehearse and maintain a rigorous schedule while his fellow FFA chapter members attend breakout sessions and presentations at the convention with Melson and chaperone Branden Smith, who teaches another section of agriculture education. A total of eight PBHS students will attend the school-sponsored event out of 48 members, based on last year's FFA involvement in activities and student fundraising.

"Anybody that can learn their music [sight unseen] with three days practice, that's pretty intense," Melson continued. "How many students do we have that are gonna get the opportunity to play in front of an audience of

70,000? It's the best of the best."

Above: Preston Ethridge receives multiple accolades during the annual FFA banquet held last school year at PBHS.

LAST UPDATED ON SEPTEMBER 19TH 2024 BY DEE LOFLIN

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