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The Boston Globe

## UMass band plays on for fallen leader



Members of the UMass marching band attended the service yesterday for George N. Parks, who died last month. (Esdras M Suarez/Globe Staff)

By **Matt Rocheleau**  
Globe Correspondent / October 17, 2010

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**AMHERST** — It was a memorial fit for a king, and to thousands of current and former members of the University of Massachusetts Amherst community and beyond, George N. Parks was just that.

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Parks, for 33 years the director of the UMass Minuteman Marching Band, died of a heart attack at age 57 last month after a band performance in Ohio. Yesterday, a rousing procession of students and alumni, including more than 900 former band members, came together for a memorial at the school's Mullins Center.

The 400 members of the current UMass band marched into the center to a five-minute standing ovation, and then belted out the school's fight song, as the crowd sang along. State Senator Stan Rosenberg, a UMass

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alumnus and a former tuba player in the marching band, read a proclamation signed by Governor Deval Patrick making Oct. 16 “George Parks Day.”

“George’s impact and George’s fame and recognition spread far and wide,” Rosenberg

said. “George was a giver, a builder, a teacher, a musician, a family man of great devotion, a source of pride and inspiration, thoughts, wisdom and a force of nature. He was all of those things but above all he was our friend, nothing more, nothing less.”

Later in the day, the alumni joined the current band to perform at halftime of the Minutemen’s matchup with the University of Richmond.

Parks, a husband and a father of two, was a drum corps specialist who had become the school’s band director at age 24. Last year, the university gave his name to the \$5.7 million George N. Parks Minuteman Marching Band Building, where the band will practice when it opens next spring.

Parks and the band had stopped to perform in Ohio en route to play at halftime in the UMass football team’s matchup with the University of Michigan at Michigan Stadium. The venue, known as “The Big House,” the largest where the UMass band has ever performed. Parks died Sept. 16. Two days later, the band performed at halftime.

At the gathering yesterday, which coincided with the first day of Alumni Weekend, the band’s manager, senior Caity Bogdan, rattled off several locations where the band has traveled in recent years. Each time she mentioned a place the band had played, she asked the crowd who among them had played there, prompting raised hands and cheers from the audience.

Others addressed the crowd, their faces projected on two jumbo-sized screens. “Since he arrived at UMass Amherst in 1977 no other individual has brought greater recognition and visibility to this campus than George did,” said campus Chancellor Robert Holub.

Alumni band member Jocelyn (Fein) Steinberg, class of 1989, said she traveled from Maryland to attend this year’s homecoming because she wanted to be among those honoring the “enthusiastic and passionate” band director who could “make you feel like you can do anything.”

While waiting in line to pick up her clarinet to play with fellow bandos during halftime, she said the memorial was a fitting, positive tribute to Parks.

“It was emotional, but in a good way,” said Steinberg. Likewise, Martha Clouse of Saugus said her daughter, Sally, who graduated in May was not planning to play with the alumni band this year because she has her first round of law school midterms next week, but after learning of Parks’s passing, the 22-year-old changed her plans.

“He’s the kind of person if you even met him once, you’d never forget him,” said Martha Clouse, looking off toward the Old Chapel, the building where the band practiced until 1997. Since then the band has used different buildings for practice.

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### Parks helped raise more than \$1 million for the new facility.

“For him, it was about giving something back to the band,” said 2008 band alum Courtney Beard. “He knew he wasn’t going to be here forever, and so he knew it would be something making sure that the band would be provided for after he left, and so alumni would always have a place to come home, even if he wasn’t there to welcome us.”

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