

Trail Mix

By Melissa Carle

We've got spirit, yes we do. We've got spirit, how 'bout you?

If you're on the receiving end of that cheer from the Steel Valley football student section, look out; because, when it comes to school spirit, this group is second to none.

This is a story about a student section—but not just any student section. One that has become more like a family whose ties extend beyond the stands and the football field.

Steel Valley is located in Munhall, approximately eight miles from downtown Pittsburgh. The Ironmen play in the WPIAL Class AA Century Conference, where they are making quite an impact so far this season.

Steel Valley's student section caught the attention of the media in Week 4, when the Ironmen faced Century Conference rival Seton-LaSalle on the road at Peters Township. Gary Goga, a high school English teacher, teamed up with the student section to organize what was dubbed a "2 X 2" theme for the game. This theme brought the student section together with members of the community, parents, teachers, school board members, band members, and cheerleaders.

Mr. Goga organized the group to line up behind the goal post upon arrival at the stadium. The group then proceeded to their seats in silence, hand-in-hand, in a solemn display of support for the team and community.

Diego Lopez, senior football player and class president, was energized by the student section that night. "Every big play that was made, you could hear their screams echo. Even though it was an away game, it felt as if we were in our home stadium," Lopez said.

Steel Valley defeated Seton-LaSalle, 27-21.

A unique theme is created for each football Friday at Steel Valley specific to that week's opponent. Adam Pasay, student section co-leader, plays an integral role in developing themes each week. "These themes include blackouts, whiteouts, pinkouts, etc.," Pasay said.

The co-leader's role does not end there though. Pasay's job requires plenty of planning, especially on game days. "I usually ask the players what they think of their opponent and

they give analysis to me,” Pasay said.

The rituals begin just before kickoff. Pasay explained, “Before kickoff, we lead the ‘I Believe’ chant. This is a confidence booster for fans and players to get more pumped up. During halftime and postgame, we all celebrate and greet the football team as they walk off of the field.”

Steel Valley’s cheerleading squad works closely with the student section – the intermediary between the fans and the team. Senior cheerleader Cassie Brugos said, “The energy we bring to a game is unmatched. Our students are on their feet the whole game supporting our players.”

Junior cheerleader Terryn Lawson shares Brugos’s appreciation for the students. “What sets our student section apart from other schools is that ours is supportive no matter what is going on in the game at the moment. They participate in our cheers that we do and their enthusiasm is like no other,” Lawson said.

These students will be the first to tell you though, that none of this would be possible without the support of faculty and administrators such as teachers like Goga and Beth McCallister, and Athletic Director Shawn McCallister.

“Mrs. McCallister,” Pasay said, “has done so much for the district in terms of school spirit over my high school tenure.”

Brugos added, “Seeing two teachers take the time out of their Friday night is important. Young adults need the support of adults to see that they care. Mrs. McCallister and Mr. Goga truly care for and support our students.”

Diego Lopez shares the admiration. “Mrs. McCallister and Mr. Goga have amazing ideas all the time for games and anything related to school spirit. Mrs. McCallister does everything she can and gives the best effort possible for us. Mr. Goga is the epitome of a great leader. When I saw the amount of people walking to the student section of the Seton game, I was in awe. They are both phenomenal people and great role models,” Lopez said.

According to Mrs. McCallister, faculty and administrators find it important to support the student section as an organization, rather than the kids simply attending games on their own. “When there is structure, the students feel as if the event is more organized and has less chance of becoming chaotic. Our students typically make good choices for themselves, but we want to be sure the excitement doesn’t get the best of them sometimes where they can get carried away and possibly make a choice that could lead to shedding a negative light on the event. Also, when there are teachers and administrators involved, the students see

that we also have school spirit and school pride and take a genuine interest in them,” McCallister said.

Athletic Director Shawn McCallister sees the student section as a tie that binds the school together. “Bringing the students together creates a feeling of camaraderie among the student body. The kids really feel part of the ‘team’ when they are organized as a group”, said McCallister. “They are able to bring all of that positive energy together to help support their classmates. It is awesome to watch how the excitement of our student body pumps up our student/athletes and really brings the school community together as a whole.”

What’s going on here is something bigger, something on a higher level than a group of kids simply sitting together in the stands on Friday nights. There is a resounding theme among this small group of faculty and students that is clearly representative of the Steel Valley community as a whole.

“...Our student section is more than just fans, they’re family,” Terryn Lawson said. “Steel Valley is more than just a school. We’re one, a family overall...”

Mr. McCallister observed this, as well. “It is a wonderful thing for me to watch the students support each other in their endeavors. We had 96 students participate on our two fan busses to Seton La Salle two weeks ago, which created a ‘family type’ atmosphere,” McCallister said.

Lopez also recognizes the importance of Steel Valley’s spirit. “School pride is what every school needs to bring students, teachers, and a community together. It’s what makes a school great and makes people say, ‘I wish I went there.’ I love my school and I will support everyone and everything that goes on in the school...We are a great school with great teachers,” Lopez said. “I’ve learned so much here and I’m proud to say I go to Steel Valley.”

Mrs. McCallister holds the Steel Valley student body in high regard. “We have TERRIFIC students here at Steel Valley. We want the students to WANT to come to school and we want ALL of the students to feel a part of the school community/family,” McCallister said.

“Some people believe that our area is run down and the kids are not worth going the extra mile to help out,” Cassie Brugos concluded. “I want people to know that we are a family. We are ‘Ironmen strong!’”

Ironmen strong they are. It is the Steel Valley family. In these uncertain times, let it be a lesson to us all.