LIFE

UCONN MARCHING BAND PREPARES FOR MACY'S THANKSGIVING DAY PARADE

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The UConn Marching Band rehearses for the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade on Tuesday, Nov. 17, 2026, in Lot W in Storrs The band will perform in New York City on Thanskgiving Day.

PHOTO BY PARKER MEYERS, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER/THE DAILY CAMPUS

Next to W Lot on the University of Connecticut campus sits a small patch of asphalt about as long as a football field.

It's lined in white paint exactly as you would find at Rentschler Field in East Hartford for a UConn football game day, with the yard markers to boot, and the sound of a pinging metronome echoes in the air of the UConn Marching Band's outdoor practice space.

From halfway up a five-story metal tower, a director bellows commands through a microphone, sometimes after just one blaring note from the brass and woodwind sections at midfield.

The UConn Marching Band will trade in that makeshift field for the streets of New York City next Thursday as the "Pride of Connecticut" performs in Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade.

"I don't think it's fully sunk in for most of us yet," seventh-semester Drum Major Noah Lafond said. "I think it's really only going to happen when we actually do the thing. It's just been a surreal opportunity for us to put in all this work knowing it's going to pay off on such a high visibility stage.

It's unreal."

Lafond, who is in his fourth year as a member of the marching band, said that the group has been rehearsing on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays — and occasionally on Saturdays when the football team is on the road — from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m.

"Just getting reps on reps in and just getting our bodies conditioned [and] ready for the two-and-a-half-mile long parade," Lafond said.

The path toward that two-and-a-half-mile walk began over a year ago, when the band first found out on Oct. 7, 2025, that it had been selected to participate in the parade. That news came as a surprise in a national TV appearance on the "Today" show in the city they would eventually return to for the parade.

"It was mid to late season, and they just said, 'Come down to the city.

We're going to get you on the morning news,'" Lafond said. "Our call time up here at W Lot was something like 1:15 a.m. We just took the long trip down. We got dressed in our uniforms, did a little segment and then we just came right back up here."

Though host Jenna Bush Hager said on TV that the band had no idea about the surprise as it jumped up and down in celebration, Lafond said that some members had begun to catch on based on seeing other marching bands' invitations to the show in past years.

"We had sort of an inkling, but we really didn't know until it was announced in the city," Lafond said. "It was just an awesome moment for all of us."

Fast forward a year, and Lafond said the band is putting in extra practice time focusing on the parade. That includes breathing and playing together, as well as moving in its parade formation.

"Just putting in some more work on cleaning feet in time and making sure we're all marching at the same tempo — same step size and all that," Lafond said. "Just trying to look as good as possible."

However, before the band heads to the Big Apple, it has a few gigs to take care of back home. The long week ahead starts with a pep band performance at the UConn women's basketball team's matchup against Seton Hall University on Friday night at PeoplesBank Arena in Hartford, followed by the band's senior game at the football team's last home contest of the season on Saturday.

After that, the focus will shift back to parade prep. That starts with a send-off outside of Gampel Pavilion Sunday at 6 p.m., in which the band will play music ranging from the school fight song to "War Pigs" by Black Sabbath.

Lafond said that the band has invited a lot of family, friends and alumni to the event.

"All the seniors and everybody in this band has put in a lot," seventh-semester Operations Officer Carter Bonura said. "I think it'll be a very nice moment because we're being appreciated for all the work we've done over the years. Sometimes, as a band, you're there to support a lot. I know some members, they always just feel like they're supporting. For them to be supported this time around,

I think that'll just bring a lot of joy."

Following two more rehearsals on Monday and Tuesday, the band will hit the road Tuesday afternoon. Once it reaches the city, the band will do a showcase for a local high school and a performance in Central Park before waking up early Thursday morning to get ready for the main event.

"Planning wise, we have to make sure instruments get where they need to go, people get where they need to go, people get fed, people get to their hotels at night," Bonura said. "We get to events on time; we don't get stuck in traffic, especially in New York City. Making sure everyone's safe and just making sure the band also has a good time because, while we are [going] to Macy's, this is a huge experience for all of the students. Making sure we're not just rehearsing 24/7. We have a few hours off to just hang out with each other and enjoy ourselves."

When the band finally marches in the parade, they'll be doing so in new navy-blue uniforms. Complete with the school's name across the chest in red and blue lettering, the new 2026 uniforms also feature a stitched image of the state of Connecticut on the left sleeve with the words "The Pride of Connecticut" spelled out in all caps on top.

"The new uniforms this year, which has been many years in the making, are a culmination of many of the uniforms of the past, taking the best of everything," Bonura said. "

For example, the tubas have a throwback of red berets. We have our new logos stamped on old uniform designs with the modern logo and more of a modern look.

They're clean. They're flashy. They're great. The entire band looks uniform. It really helps because, with the band growing musically and visually to a whole new skill level, we now have these uniforms to match."

With a send-off, new uniforms and a jam-packed schedule once the band reaches the city, Bonura said that he is excited to just be in the center of it all come parade time and to show how far the band has come in his time at UConn.

"I feel like a lot of times for pep band games, which [are] great, but we're supporting the team that's there," Bonura said. "The Final Four, that's basketball's spotlight and we're there supporting them. This is us showing off who we are, and this is us getting the spotlight for all the work we've done over the years. I know all the directors, the staff, the students, we have built this program up from when it took a huge dip during COVID-19 to better than it was before and better than it's ever been."



The UConn Marching Band's rehearsal location at Lot W, a patch of asphalt lined in white paint. The marching band will trade in that makeshift field for the streets of New York City next Thursday as the "Pride of Connecticut" performs in Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade.

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