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## 2008 US Open Brass Band Championship - Postcard from St Charles

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There may have been a change in venue at the US Open, but the contest is fast gaining a reputation of brass with class...

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*Fountain overflows: MD Joe Parisi takes the US Open Trophy*

With the move to St. Charles, Illinois, 2008 U.S. Open began with a few changes in venue. The Friday evening Busker's preview found itself at McNally's pub that was crammed to capacity awaiting the event.

I don't know if there is anything that can be done about the crowd camped out to see the Buskers, but all brass band events should have such problems!

### **Adding class**

Adding a bit of class to an already classy event, the main contest on Saturday was held at the Norris Cultural Arts Centre. In contrast to previous years, which were held at a nice high school auditorium, simple walking in the front door at the venue immediately felt like a major event. There was also a good-sized and responsive audience for most of the day.

### **Showdown**

As expected, the contest itself featured a showdown between Fountain City and Central Florida, between

Michael J. Garasi (the showman) and Joe Parisi (the surgeon). Garasi's band pipped Fountain City on entertainment points, but it was Parisi's surgical precision with the music and improved band sound that made the difference for Fountain City.

Looking back the past four years at this event both bands have both won twice, but results could have gone either way, the competition is just that good. However, Fountain City have found the key to winning as of late and will surely be excellent ambassadors for America at next year's Brass in Concert.

### **Closing in**

There also seems to be some other band closing in on the competition. Eastern Iowa has been inching ever closer and were nearly within striking range this year. The two new bands, Madison and Ohio, showed much promise (with Ohio actually winning the entertainment prize).

### **Improving showmanship**

In fact, all around showmanship has been improving. If you're a member of a non-competing band, you really ought to get to a major entertainment championship. These events remind us of all the little things every band should be doing each concert to win over audiences. Those little details: putting instruments up and down together, featured soloists moving to the front of the band with music memorized, quick transitions between various staging, they all add so much to the performance.

### **Small details**

We must remember that in today's multimedia age, concerts are performances. Concerts are more than just about music. There is no "magic bullet" to create an entertaining and audience friendly program, but so many of these small details can be learned at a contest like this.

That being said, good playing is one of the most entertaining things a band can do, and ultimately why Fountain City took the title.

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