Ms. Merri Gensley is the head band director at Tusky Valley High School in Tuscarawas County. For her undergraduate degree, she attended The University of Mount Union for two years, and Kent State University for two years. She then went to Vandercook College of Music to get her master’s degree. Her major instrument was clarinet, which she played in concert band, and she played trombone as a secondary instrument in the marching band. Since her time in school, she has been teaching music for about 38 years. In these 38 years, she gained experience at many different schools. She started teaching at Tusky Valley in the school year of 1987-88. She then went to East Canton for one year, and then spent a good deal of time in the Catholic school system. She then returned to Tusky Valley, where she is still teaching.

Ms. Gensley knew from the time that she was in eighth grade that she wanted to be a band director one day. She explained the story of how she came to this desire. Ms. Gensley has a sister who is nine years older than her, and she always looked up to her. Her sister played clarinet, and Ms. Gensley wanted to play clarinet just like her sister, only she wanted to be better than her. In fifth grade, she started playing clarinet, and in eighth grade she realized that music was the only thing she wanted to do with her life. So throughout high school she worked diligently to learn her scales, and she took class A solos to Solo and Ensemble competitions every year.

Almost everyone has a role model, or someone that they look up to. Ms. Gensley said that her role model is Dr. Patricia Grutzmacher from Kent State University. Dr. Grutzmacher is professor emeritus at Kent State, where she teaches music education courses, and for a time taught applied oboe. Ms. Gensley says she admires the abilities and knowledge that Dr. Grutzmacher has.
Dr. Grutzmacher assists Ms. Gensley in preparing the Tusky Valley bands for district and state competitions, and Ms. Gensley thinks very highly of the advice that Dr. Grutzmacher gives to the students. If a teacher is a good teacher, they will never stop learning. Ms. Gensley says that Dr. Grutzmacher is a very knowledgeable person, and she has learned many things from her. For example, Ms. Gensley said that she never knew what was meant by a “dark sound” until Dr. Grutzmacher explained it to her. Ms. Gensley is always willing to learn and to better herself, and she greatly respects the advice that Dr. Grutzmacher has to give.

It is a given that funny things are going to happen in a band, and Ms. Gensley shared two such stories. One story she shared involved a mellophone player during the marching band season. Ms. Gensley told the band numerous time to be ready to play the fight song after the conversion. After a few time of hearing this, the mellophone player had a very confused look on his face, and Ms. Gensley asked him what was wrong. He explained his confusion, and said that he had never played the fight song “African version.” The second story Ms. Gensley shared involved a few trumpet players, also during marching band. The trumpets sounded very sharp in one section of a song, so Ms. Gensley told them to adjust their embrasure.

Ms. Gensley is a very wise woman who has a good plan for her band and loves what she does. Her favorite thing about teaching music is having a close relationship with her students through music. She has many families go through band with her, and that creates a very welcoming feeling of community.

There are many qualities that Merri Gensley possesses that are very helpful in a music education career. She is hardworking, knowledgeable, willing to learn, passionate about her work, caring for the outcome that her students get, and dedicated to giving them the best musical
experience possible. Along with all of these qualities, she has a great sense of humor that brings everything together.