

## NEWSROOM

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IMPAIRMENT

TRUMPETER SAYS “I WANT TO DO WHAT OTHER PEOPLE DO”

by [Kelli Caplan](#) | October 25, 2023*Read time: about 3 min*

When Raechel Erler visited Christopher Newport as a high school senior, she was blown away by the high energy and dynamic presence of the Marching Captains. She immediately knew she wanted to be a part of it.

“I was able to see the Marching Captains in action on my visit,” Erler said. “It was really cool to watch them practice. The band was huge and so good!” On that day and every day, Erler “sees” the Marching Captains unlike any other member of the band.

Erler has been legally blind since birth. Although she does have peripheral vision, she can't see anything in front of her — including sheet music. She has adapted by learning to play music by ear. Once she hears a piece, she says she can figure out fairly quickly how to play it. Moving in step with the band is another challenge for Erler. Occasionally other band members will assist her when she needs it, but mostly she relies on her peripheral vision.

"I want to do what other people do," said Erler, '26 [criminology](#). "I know there are things I can't do. But I always try to figure out a way to do something if I want to do it."

Erler brings plenty of marching band experience with her — she's been playing trumpet in various bands since fifth grade. Playing the instrument comes naturally to her, she says, because she hails from a family of musicians and shares her love of the trumpet with her father. Being able to play in a college marching band has been a dream of hers for years. When she learned CNU had such a robust band, she was elated.

"I really enjoy playing," Erler said, "I've been a Marching Captain ever since I got here."

While the everyday tasks that other students encounter take a little more thought or effort for Erler, she has proven to herself that her resolve and capabilities are much greater than any of the challenges she faces. Being in the Marching Captains has been an anchor in Erler's CNU experience. It has allowed her to capitalize on her love of music while also providing a foundation of fun and friends.

Erler knows her fellow Marching Captains are there if she needs them both on and off the field.

"The rank leaders are always making sure she gets to where she needs to. Even with that though, Raechel is really good at fitting the form," said bandmate Christopher Lubinski, '24. Having done this through high school, she has the experience and level of commitment to where she is capable of doing a lot of these actions on her own. While she does need our help pointing out where her sets are, once she has those figured out she nails them pretty well whenever we march our shows."

Erler was born with a genetic condition that caused her blindness. She can read Braille, but is also able to use an iPad for some of her classwork. She takes exams in the testing center, which allows her a bit more time. In addition to her work with the Marching Captains, Erler is an avid member of the Knights of the Force lightsaber club on campus, which allows her to channel her love of Star Wars.

Academically, Erler has discovered calling at Christopher Newport. She is on the pre-law track, involved with the pre-law fraternity and is focused on going to law school. Once she graduates, she hopes to become an attorney who helps survivors of domestic violence. Her long range goal is to be a criminal prosecutor. She plans on volunteering for non-profit advocacy groups as much as possible to get hands-on experience.

Law was not Erler's original focus. When she started as a freshman, she was intent on doing forensics, an interest she acquired from crime shows on TV. But that all shifted when the classes Erler was taking, such as Encounters with the Constitution and Introduction to American Law, proved both enlightening and interesting to her and she began to see herself in a courtroom defending survivors and bringing attackers to justice. The fact that Christopher Newport offers a 3+3 fast track program allowing pre-law students to get a law degree in six years instead of seven with the help of partner law schools has been a huge incentive for her.

When Erler started looking at colleges as a high school senior, she was in search of a small school that would still be able to broaden her horizons. Christopher Newport was one of six schools to which she applied, but once she visited CNU, she was confident she had found her new home. She knew that her mind was made up when she changed the colors of her rubber bands on her braces to CNU blue and silver. The layout of the campus and the support on campus all helped her to finalize the decision.

"It just felt right," she said.

Erler says her experience at Christopher Newport has been enriched by a close community, engaged professors, and small classes. Being an integral part of the Marching Captains has simply reinforced her love of the school. Each time she marches onto the field, playing the instrument she adores and surrounded by a supportive group of musicians, she feels connected and inspired.

"I picked well," she said. "I would absolutely choose it again."

