

The Saginaires Alumni Association Newsletter

April 2001

Letter From the Alumni Chair:

Dear S.Y.O. Alumni,

After a long dry spell (largely due to the fact that the three main volunteers are spread over about 200 miles), the Saginaires Alumni Association has much to get ready for! After about three years of idea swapping, plans, and grand expectations, it looks as though things are about to get moving in the right direction.

After meeting with Steve Cross to discuss instructing the South Lyon Band this fall, I discovered that he was an brass instructor with NA in '96! Having a band of almost 200 (and the equipment to boot), the old wheels got to crankin' about borrowing horns for an alumni parade corps. Plans are still evolving and discussions with the South Lyon school board concerning inventory tracking and red tape still need to happen, but optimism runs high that we could form an alumni parade corps in time to do some 4th of July and other parades *this summer!* If you'd be interested in being a part of this low-commitment, sure-to-be-fun ensemble, please contact me at the info below.

In addition, Steve had suggested the possibility of the South Lyon Band sponsoring the corps until it's back on its feet. The exact level of the band's commitment to the corps and other details has yet to be determined, but at the minimum, an unofficial partnership could still benefit the corps greatly. Having a band of nearly 200 students could provide not only a great membership base, but an *enormous* volunteer and sponsor base as well.

Let us also not forget that the summer is fast approaching! Plans are underway to coincide the Saginaires Alumni Picnic with the Toledo DCM show at the University of Toledo Glass Bowl on June 16th. The Glassmen Alumni have also invited us to watch the open rehearsal in the early afternoon with them. We're looking into group rate tickets and may be offering a package deal (picnic & tickets). We had a lot of fun a couple years ago with this outing, and with so many more people excited about the alumni movement, we'll have even more fun this year! Mark it on your calendar—details will be forthcoming!

Finally, the culminating event of the season: DCI Finals! The Alumni (and possibly the South Lyon Band) will be hosting a DCI Live party. This may be coupled with a spaghetti dinner to become a fund-raiser. The details are still in the works, but the date is set! Clear Saturday, August 11th on you calendars, folks, for a chance to see some old Northern Aurora shows, reunite with old friends, meet new friends, and see the Best of the Best for 2001!

It's been a long wait, but with the drumcorps season upon us, the encouragement from other alumni groups and corps, the help of the South Lyon band, and more alumni eagerly awaiting a chance to get involved, the time is right to rekindle the Saginaires and begin our re-emergence as Michigan's top drum and bugle corps!

Sincerely,
Paul D. Keiser
Co-Chair, Saginaires Alumni Association
Northern Aurora Drum & Bugle Corps 1990-94

Alumni Gather in Support at MCGC Finals

Larry Hammond
Saginaires, 1965-1984

Congratulations to all the participants at SVSU-Michigan Color Guard Circuit state finals. An outstanding and well-organized day.

Special "Congrats" to Arthur Hill's GREAT show! It took me back to my junior year at Arthur Hill in 1969, when I felt so alone as the only band member in a Drum Corps. Seeing Dick Jensen and all the Arthur Hill supporters there made it all seem worthwhile. The kids in band back then just didn't have a clue! Now their kids understand.

Mike Curtis, Rich Hogan, Dan Mihalko, Steve Yoder and MR Fitzpatrick, And what a place to meet old friends! Danny Trepia, Cindy Andrews, Tommy Sims, Dick Jensen, Alvin King, Orlando Suttles, Brian Levak, The GREAT Steve Yoder, I haven't seen this group together since about 1979. Great Job!

Visit <http://www.mcgc.net> for scores and recaps of MCGC Finals and the entire 2001 MCGC season. Or, visit <http://www.wgi.org> for scores and info from the WGI World Championships in Milwaukee.



Faint Recollections of

Chapter 2: “You want us to play *and* march?” by Bill Heilig [Saginaires ‘67-‘73]

We all worked at selecting music and doing a basic job of creating a rough resemblance of a musical score, something that could be recognized as a song. None of us were really experienced in doing so, but the only way to learn is to dive in... We probably should have waded rather than dive. It only took us a couple of weeks before even we could play it and tell it was a song. The entire group of about sixteen of us stood in neat rows, the din bouncing from wall to wall until our ears rang—and when we were given a break, mouths moved but the sound was a muffled, garbled mess. Then it was announced that we would, as long as the weather held out, begin to learn to march. Since quite a few of us were in marching band, we snorted that we didn’t need to practice marching... and soon found out different. For myself, and some others, we marched in a band that used the traditional high step. Thighs parallel to the ground on each step, shoulders thrown back, and head held high. While this worked great with a sax, playing a drum with a sling posed an entirely new set of rules to this game. Marching in place, it soon became apparent to me that this method *sucked!* Thereafter, I barely moved my toes while marking time and marching became an exercise in maintaining a precarious balance until medical tape, duct tape and ace bandages became common knowledge to keep the drum from leaving permanent scars.

The best description one can give of the first few sessions outside is one of a herd of drunken clowns staggering about the parking lot, unsure of what to do. A couple of persons who have never in their lives attempted to march in a straight line keep going over the same path again and again. Within a couple of hours, we began to look as if we could all march in a sort of straight line and somewhat in step. Sometimes. If each lap of that small parking lot were laid end to end, I would guess we maybe

marched about five miles. To set the mood and give you, the reader, a more accurate picture of what we experienced, let me describe for you, Carrollton on a warm fall night.

The sky was colored in reds and oranges, wisps of clouds hanging suspended in the deepening violet of nightfall. The sound of trucks, growling in the background in a seemingly endless convoy, punctuated the soft shuffle of our feet as we tried to stay in step. There was a gritty feel to the air as dust settles and was raised by our passage on the pavement and by the trucks nearby. Turning to the left in a ‘company front’ (and I use the term loosely here), to the handclaps of our first drum major, Rob [Waskoviak], and the cadence called out, “left...

The consensus was that we adjourn for the night to the relatively pristine air of the hall. Instead, we received a reward of marching around the block several times.

left... left, right, left.” Suddenly—a slap! Then another, and another. The mosquitoes were beginning to stir. The irregular slaps came more often, competing with the sound of our feet and soft mumbled curses about creatures that shouldn’t be allowed a place in the world. The call of halt, and everyone stopped in place, took a deep

breath—and the sudden moans aloud about the God-awful *stink* of the sugar beet plant just a couple of blocks to the north. Since we had made some progress in keeping the lines straight, keeping in step and generally not complaining, the consensus was that we adjourn for the night to the relatively pristine air of the hall. Instead, we received a reward of marching around the block several times. North, up Carrollton road to the first dirt road and company fronts to the left. Past the mounds of sugar beets with everyone attempting to hold their collective breath as we marched past in a haze of *stink* so bad our eyes watered. Across the railroad tracks, along side the cooling pond, every step an aural invitation to the millions of mosquitoes waiting to fatten themselves on our sweating skin. We trudged on and on as the light waned and the streetlights cast puddles upon the road, highlighting us for the bloodthirsty hoards lurking in the evening sky. Coughing and slapping, we finished our torture and retreated to the safety of the building. Forgotten was that we had left all the windows and doors open and

Drum Corps Past...

the room was full of flying, blood-sucking bugs. We were miserable. We continued in this sad adventure until we actually stopped complaining and realized that we *were* doing this. Then we started all over again, *with* instruments. Back to square one.

I have no idea who announced that we would march about the parking lot and play our one and only song. The best description of that first attempt would be the slaughter of pigs with cannon fire. Imagine, if you will, the tramp of sneakered feet on asphalt, the honks and bleats of distressed geese, with the hammering and banging of blind carpenters looking for that lone nail. In short, those first attempts at marching and playing were *horrible!* Somehow, before the snow began to fly in earnest, we managed to work at it until we actually could tell what we were playing nearly as well moving as we did standing still. Work continued all winter with the goal of preparing for a parade. We were going to perform in public. We looked at each other in confusion and with a little bit of awe. Had we progressed that far? Were we ready for this? *No!* We weren't—but when did that ever stop a kid?

St. Patrick's Day, Bay City, Michigan... And so cold we didn't want to think about it. Snow flurries in the air led us to wonder about "warm woolies" and dogsleds. Bob and Tom had come up with an idea for a uniform. We all traveled to JC Penney's (the height of marching fashion) and we each bought a pair of black pants, a white satin turtleneck and a red beret. Black shoes and socks completed the stylish ensemble. Some of us had the foresight to get larger sizes so that we could add many layers of insulation in preparation for the ordeal to come. Our instruments were a mix of everything that has been discarded by everyone else on the face of the earth, handmade, and even borrowed—and we were ready? *Not!* The drum line had written (and could sometimes remember) the entire street cadence. The roll off still sounded like pots and pans falling down stairs, but we tried.

Lucky for us, we were packed tightly in a car, and the heater worked. We would soon come to wish for a heated float or anything warm. With our heads held high, we set off down Washington Street and stare ahead. That road seemed to fade into forever! We had no idea how far we needed to attempt to march and play. The snare line and the tenors were beaten within the first few blocks by the slapping of cold chrome steel against their legs. It would have been useful to know that the drum should not be

flapping loosely on a sling and against our legs. The two bass drummers complained that they could no longer feel their hands. They had been warned to hit further on the heads to prevent whacked knuckles on the wooden rims. The scant lines of horns that we had, complained of mouthpieces frozen to lips and the color guard, when asked to spin the flags, offered the rejected suggestion that they would rather wrap them around themselves. We did, however, manage to make a fair accounting of ourselves. At the end of what we surmized was a 100-mile parade, we piled all back into the two station wagons, heaped our instruments around us and headed for home. We were thawed sometime later that day.

That ordeal behind us, we felt elated! We had survived a parade and as soon as spring and summer arrived we claimed to look forward to an improved performance.

Several parades later we began to feel a bit cocky. We could march and play at the same time. We thought of ourselves as being 'good'. That feeling continued through the springtime and we were told about contests held by DCM. There were names tossed about, some with an air of reverence that some of us marching band trained found a bit mystifying. The Royal Lancers, The Guardsmen, The Lionettes, The Ironmen, Praesidium, the Bandettes and many others. All members of a fraternity that we also belonged to but most of us had never seen or heard of. A few of those groups had been seen in the distance and heard in passing in some of the parades we had been in. OK, they were bigger and sounded so. There was more to come that I was not quite aware of.

[to be continued...]

Addendum from Larry Hammond:

Just a couple of suggestions so far. First of all, our uniform was not quite as you described at first. We wore, at first (direct from JC Penney's), short sleeve white shirts with embroidered Saginaw shoulder emblems (pictures exist). A dark navy-blue dickie (turtle-neck thing). Plain black trousers and black shoes. A black beret at first. I believe our first performance was the dedication of the "New Soap-box-derby hill" in Buena Vista Twp. Our first "real" uniforms were the plain white satin shirts, button-in red satin dickies, home-applied white-striped black trousers and white Bucks and different colored berets depending on section. Later we added white satin shirts with the red satin stripe on the sleeve with military shakos with the small upright feather. Then the Corps went to the all-red tunics with the slant white stripe on the front and shakos then Aussie style black hats.

I might suggest that you lay the groundwork for your well-written essays by explaining to the "younger alum" the way Drum Corps was in the sixties. The instruments, *and* the philosophy of militarism and heritage. For instance, decorum concerning respect for the Colors. Carrying *real* rifles and swords. Bugles with One piston valve and *one* rotary valve were brand new and there was no such thing as DCI.

Annual Alumni Picnic to be Held in Toledo

This year's Annual Alumni Picnic is tentatively scheduled for Saturday, June 16th at 2:00PM at Wildwood Metropark in Toledo, Ohio. Everyone is encouraged to attend and bring drumcorps photos, corps jackets, audio recordings, videos, and/or other drumcorps memorabilia. A modest donation toward the purchase of food and drink would be appreciated.

After the picnic, the group will relocate to the University of Toledo Glass Bowl to watch the 2001 All-Star Review, sponsored by the Glassmen Drum and Bugle Corps. Show time and ticket price will be announced at a later date.

Maps, directions, and additional information regarding the Alumni Picnic will be posted at <http://northernaurora.tripod.com> – for those of you without internet access, please call Paul Keiser at (248) 691-0320.



The Saginaires Alumni Association
%o Diana M. Cook, Co-Chair
316 Ridge St.
Bowling Green, OH 43402

Ten Years Ago: The 1991 Northern Aurora Drum & Bugle Corps



Above: The 1991 Northern Aurora Drum and Bugle Corps.
Thanks to Paul Keiser [baritone, 1990-94] for providing this photo.

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