

Drum and bugle corps returns to Welland

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For The Tribune

WELLAND — For a brief time last Sunday, the north end of the city was reverberating once again to the unmistakable sound of drums and bugles as the Optimists Alumni Drum and Bugle Corps held an open house at Auberge Richelieu.

The corps brought their road show to Welland as part of an ongoing mission to revitalize drum corps activity in southern Ontario.

Throughout the 1950s, 60s and well into the 70s, drum corps or trumpet bands as they were then known were thriving. In fact at one point in the mid-60s there were 17 trumpet bands just in the Niagara area. Some of these were the Welland-Crowland Lancers, Grantham Police Boys Band, Niagara Militaires and Port Dalhousie Guardsmen. By 1990, only four were still active in southern Ontario, Toronto Signals, Kingston Grenadiers, Kawartha Cavaliers and Dutch Boy from Kitchener.

However, in the last two decades, corps reunions and open houses have spawned drum corps performing units inspiring an exciting new movement.

Welland's own Bellerophon Drum and Bugle Corps began in 1993 and continues to thrive today.

The United Alumni Drum and Bugle Corps from Simcoe was formed in 1998 after a drum corps reunion.

Membership was comprised of former members of the Simcoe Boy Scout Trumpet Band, Optimists Band, Royal Blues, Simcoe Golden Lions, and Lakeshore Brassmen.

All the corps operated out of the Simcoe area. A decade ago the famous Preston Scout House fielded a virtual replica of their legendary 1950s Corps complete with uniforms, glockenspiels, drill formations, and their unforgettable crowd pleasing repertoire.

The Optimist Alumni began in 2003 and evolved their program



Supplied Photo

The Optimists Alumni Drum and Bugle Corps held an open house at Auberge Richelieu.

into a full field show in 2007 with old familiar Toronto Optimists tunes.

That same year Les Diplomates from Quebec City reappeared with their trademark one of a kind' presentation.

In 2006, the Niagara Falls Militaires restarted as a parade corps after a long hiatus. London Ontario Midlanders struck up a mini-corps in 2007 and rumour has it they will produce a field corps in 2010.

Fierce rivalries from the 1950s through to the 70s unfortunately

meant, "competition separated us."

In today's climate, fortunately, "camaraderie binds us together."

One of the many guests that showed up on Sunday was 90-year-old Welland resident Ernie Christie.

Ernie remembers the drum corps "heyday" in the Niagara area as he often chauffeured his two boys, Robert and John to and from rehearsals and performances.

Both of Ernie's boys were members of the Optimists Drum Corps in the late 1960s.

"It's great to know that the activity we all enjoyed so much is undergoing a renaissance" Ernie said as he watched the corps perform.

Other guests included Pete Barclay, from Fonthill, who was a member in 1967, and Mark Bishop, from Wainfleet, who at one time played with the Oakland Crusaders from Etobicoke as well as the Cadets from Garfield, NJ.

"Our corps ... is pleased with our reception here in Welland this weekend," said corps Director Rick Robida at the end of the event.