



Toronto Optimists History-Newsletter

This publication honours and continues the tradition started by Don Daber in 1960.
Toronto Optimists History - Newsletter is published quarterly.

The Toronto Optimists History website celebrates:

The Toronto Optimists Drum & Bugle Corps 1958 - 1975 | The Seneca Optimists Drum & Bugle Corps 1976 - 1978

Published by Bob Carell. Please direct inquiries to: Toronto_Optimist@rogers.com

A PDF version is available on the website: www.TorontoOptimistsHistory.ca



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CONTRIBUTE TO YOUR Newsletter

Contribute to your newsletter

Send your suggestions, stories or articles to Bob: toronto_optimist@rogers.com

We publish four issues each year. New issues are posted mid-month, in January, April, July and October.

IMPORTANT: The Toronto Optimists History - Newsletter is ONLY available in Acrobat (PDF) format.



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WEBSITE ADDITIONS

Additions to both the **Main website** and the **Photo Gallery** continue to be made.

New photos are added to the gallery about twice each week.



Cardinal Cadets (Lamport Stadium, Toronto, 1978)

WEBSITE UPDATE:

What's new on TorontoOptimistsHistory.ca

A **BOUT TWICE A WEEK** I update the Photo Gallery with photos from the competitive years; however, this schedule sometimes slips, depending on what is happening in my life. Even though the focus of our site is the Optimist Family (Toronto Optimists, Seneca Optimists and our feeder corps), we always post photos of other corps that competed during the old days. While the majority of these photos are from Ontario-based corps, the site includes many photos of our American competitors. This page includes two retreat photos. The top image show the Cardinal Cadets at a 1978 contest in Toronto while the bottom image was taken at a 1962 contest in Rome, New York when Optimists beat Blessed Sacrament for the first time. Both of these photos were recently added to the Photo Gallery.

In addition to photos, I have recently added a couple of old issues of Green Capsule Comments.

There's already a wealth of information on the main website, so it's difficult to know what to add. If you have suggestions for new material that will improve the website, please let us know.



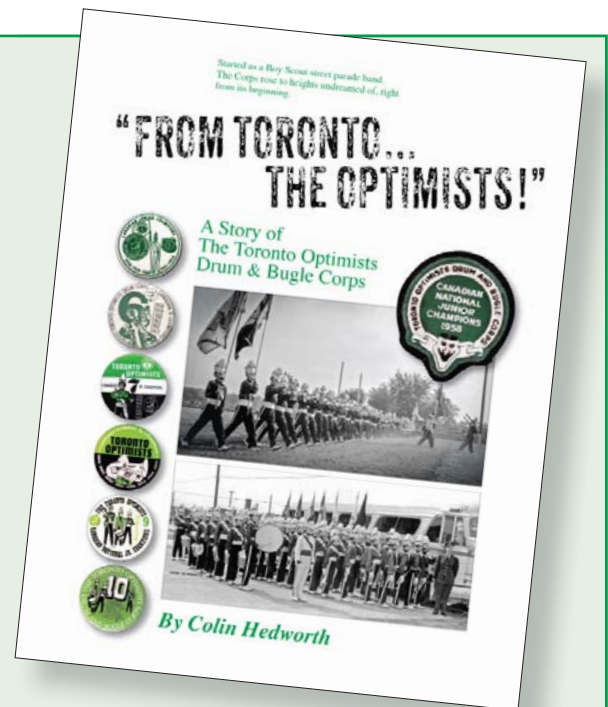
Blessed Sacrament Golden Knights (Rome, 1962)

In our next newsletter: Chapters 27 and 28

The next issue of the Newsletter (April) will include Chapters 27 and 28 from Colin Hedworth's book "From Toronto... The Optimists!".

IN THEIR FIRST year of competition, the Seneca Optimists had broken into DCI's top 12. Would they be able to improve their position in 1977? For the first time in DCI's history, two corps for the same city, the Oakland Crusaders and the Seneca Optimists, had successfully entered DCI's top 12. Would there be a repeat in 1977? Colin talks about all of this and more in Chapter 27.

THE NATURE OF life is change, and it is not always in our favour. After the 1977 season, the Seneca Optimists lost more than half of its members! This created a major challenge for the corps. In Chapter 28, Colin talks about how the corps dealt with this challenge.



Seneca Optimists (DCI Allentown, 1978)

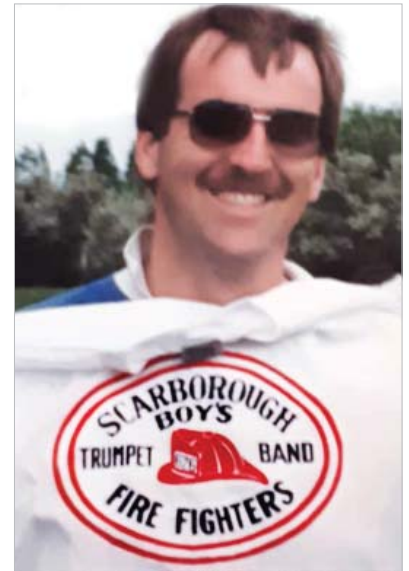
The book "From Toronto... The Optimists!" is out of print.

The Firefighters/ Princemen Story Championship Pursuit

by *Dave Hopkins*

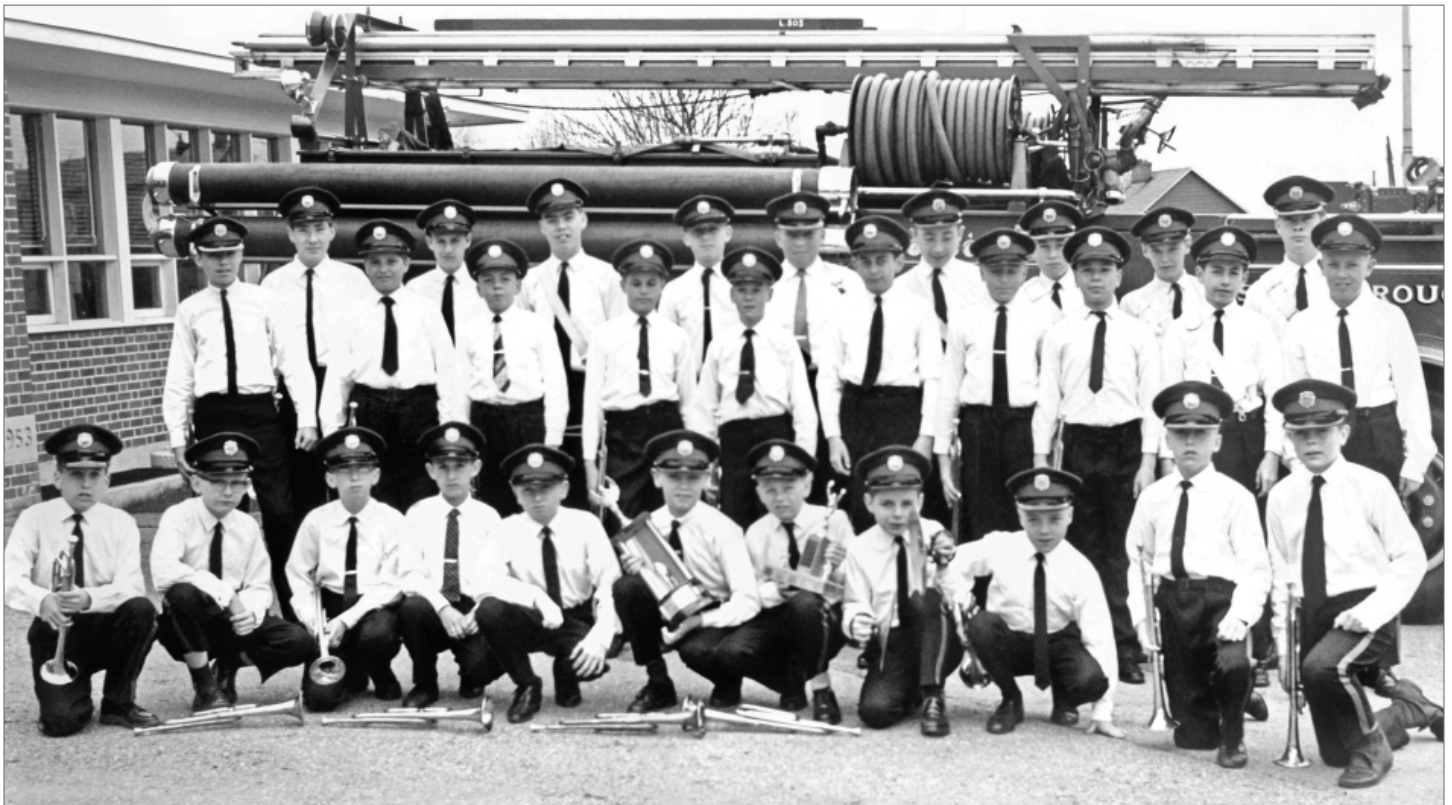
THE LIFETIME span of a Drum and Bugle Corps varies from town to town, province to province, and state to state. With the Scarborough Firefighters, turned Seneca Princemen, that tenure was 1961 to 1975. This is a story of growth, determination and the pursuit of Championships. From humble beginnings through chasing down the London Midlanders for the Junior “B” title (1970) and then finally capturing the legendary Toronto Optimists for the Junior “A” crown (1974).

There were many ups and downs, defections, team building and triumphs along the way. Brothers and sisters, cousins and schoolmates as well as several corps related marriages that took us through these many years. The strong bond carried on through the years with our annual Golf Tournament and Family Picnic, an Alumni Hockey team and well attended reunions in 1990 and 2018.



Tim Burrage at a corps reunion

The following saga will attempt to give you some big picture perspective on how we achieved our goals.



Scarborough Firefighters Boys' Trumpet Band (Dorset Fire Hall, 1965)

This photo includes "Lifers" Greg Robinson, Tim Burrage, Gerry Hepburn, Ron Smith, Dave Willis and Johnny Phillips

Humble Beginnings: (1961-1965)

THINGS GOT STARTED way back in 1961 when the Scarborough Firefighters and Local 626 approached the Highland Creek Boy's Band about a sponsorship opportunity. The rank-and-file Firemen had always appeared in full dress uniforms as a marching unit in the annual Labour Day Parade at the CNE in Toronto. What they needed was a marching rhythm section to complete their presentation. Under the auspices of Bill Reed, Len Carrigan and Les Hopkins, a deal was struck and Local 626 had their marching band. The Scarborough Boys Trumpet Band was born. Rehearsals moved to the Dorset Fire Hall on Kingston Road and lots of neighbourhood kids joined up. 1965 saw us venture into the Canadian Drum Corps family and at our very first National Championship we were crowned as Novice Champions at Varsity Stadium.



Jacket Crest

It was onward and upward to the Junior "B" ranks to battle the likes of the Golden Monarchs, Michael Power Knights, Les Dynamiques and the Marching Saints.

The Next Hill To Climb (1966-1970)

FROM OUR INCEPTION, we were a small parade corps, consisting entirely of boys. Our uniform included white shirts, ties, black pants and a forage cap. All of that changed in 1966 when our corps entered the world of M&M competition. We looked great in our new silk red tunics with a diagonal white stripe, red shakos with white plumes, and black pants sporting a red stripe. In addition, we were no longer an all-male corps as Norma Smith, Carol Hopkins, Nancy Johnson and other females joined our colour guard.



Scarborough Firefighters "Off The Line" (1966)



Drum Major Bill Reed leads Scarborough Firefighters (1966)



L-R Shirley Trotter, Drum Majors Harry Francis and Bill Reed and Guard Captain Betty Paul (1966)

We added veteran Drum Corps instructors – Al Anderson on drums, Bob Davidson with the Guard and Harry Francis on marching and drill. The membership grew with many from nearby RH King Collegiate joining the ranks. We had moved our outdoor rehearsals over to the field below Birchmount Collegiate. It had a natural amphitheatre feel to it where instructors and family members could watch from the top to the bowl down on to the field. Some members found it difficult getting down to the practice ground – including bass drummer John Bay who while racing to the starting line rolled “ass over tea kettle” (three rotations with drum on) and still managed to roll right up, in perfect stride to head for the starting line. Alumni will tell you that incident was the funniest thing they’d ever seen. Another milestone from 1966 included the startup of our feeder corps, The Sparkies. The Nationals were in Montreal that year and we came in 5th out of 6 in our initial attempt in this category.



Scarborough Firefighters (1967)

The following season saw continued growth in membership and sophistication. The Golden Monarchs had folded in late 1966 and while a number of their senior members went to the Optimists and Del, we managed to scoop up more than a dozen of their members for ourselves including our new horn instructor and future Corps Director Fred Hehn. The guard carried multicolored Centennial flags to commemorate our country’s Centenary. The Nationals were held in Ottawa that year and the final scores were: The London Midlanders 77.83, The Carlton Place Marching Saints 72.51 and the Firefighters 72.25.



A few members of the Sparkies (1967)

Continuing our upward trajectory, 1968 saw the addition of our three person sabre line, our “Big Three” soprano trio emerged, side drums grew to three and three and the guard was clicking along under Lois Smith. Early that season we finally beat the famous St. John’s Girls in Welland, ON – a major accomplishment at that time in our history. We had several head-to-head meetings with the Midlanders that summer, winning in Brantford in July and at the CNE the week before Nationals. It all came down to a sunny Saturday afternoon at the Nationals in Kingston, ON. Final Junior “B” scores: Midlanders 65.3, Scarborough 64.3, Marching Saints 55.8, Les Companion 50.5 and Michael Power Knights 50.3. What a season!



Scarborough Firefighters (1967) Front row drumline L-R: Tim Burrage, Tom Hopkins, Donny McDougall, Paul McCourt, Tom "Gronk" Ensign, Davey Phillips, "Caveman", Rod Patterson, Joe Trotter Jr, John Bay and Larry Francis.

Depending on your perspective, 1969 was a mish-mash of success/failure. Our horn line was superb under the direction of Fred Hehn and Henry Sliwinski. Soloists Johnny and Greg made us stand out in our own category and beyond. We did have problems with our drumline however. Back in June, we had a potential of 4 snares. Health became an issue... snare one Donny got sick, snare two Paul continued to lead, Snare three Roddy was rocking



Scarborough Firefighters at the Grand Opening of the Simpson's store at Cedarbrae Plaza. Guard Captain Carol Hopkins out front (1969)

and snare four was struggling to make the line. Donny had to quit, Rod got sick and Johnny went to Opti. Just when we thought we had the Midlanders in our sites (superior hornline/guard) we started to fall behind. At the Provincials, Midlanders won 69.2 to us at 65.1 with Les Compagnons hot on our tail (64.6). Practices became harder for the drum section because of the talent available. Nationals came to Ottawa and our corps stayed at the Beacon Arms, downtown. We still refer to it as the "Broken Arms". They had us packed in six to a room and the most senior of the drumline decided to do a "tighty-whitey"

raid on the Guard, who were a couple of floors down. We knocked on all their doors and then shook our covered "junk" at them to various cat calls and screams of get lost. What a riot!

It was a historic event for the Junior side as De La Salle finally broke the Optimists astounding record of 10 straight championships. Del won 80.85, Optimists 80.80 and La Salle Cadets 78.65. Our 1969 sojourn ended in a humiliating 11 point loss to the London Midlanders. (9 points on drums alone!)



Firefighters step "Off the Line" (1969)

FEATURE ARTICLE: Firefighters / Princemen (continued)

1970 was going to be our year. A completely rebuilt drumline: four snares, three tenors, two sets of tuned triple bass, four bass drums and three cymbals (all brand new BTW) were carried by a good mixture of veterans and newbies. Our uniforms were upgraded by Mitzi Kumagai and her group of volunteers (incl. new decorative chains and black stripes added to the tunics, a new sunshine pattern on our shakos and a red and white stripe down our black uniform pants). The horn line was getting stronger by the minute and our brand new 7 person rifle line made their debut.



Scarborough Firefighters' Rifles (1970)

L-R: Janet Lynch, Pat Bacon, Joni Morton, Wendy Taylor, Edith Walker, Linda ("Twiggy") Hepburn and Donna Sims

We went head-to-head vs the Midlanders 3 times in June – they won by less than a point in Woodstock, ON, we won by less than 2 points in Guelph and then they came back and beat us 60.6 to 59.3 on our own field in Scarborough. From there, our paths didn't really cross that much as we competed on the Penn-York circuit (which we won) and the Midlanders chose another set of contests (including winning the World Open Class A). Both Corps did meet up in Etobicoke on August 8 where we beat them by less than a 10th. We also missed each other at the Provincials (which we won) but it all came to the final showdown at the Canadian Nationals at Varsity Stadium on September 12th. That night



Scarborough Firefighters (1970)

Del won the Junior "A" crown for a second year in a row (84 to 83.15 for La Salle and 77.7 for the Optimists). The announcer came over the speaker to announce: "In third place with a score of 66.8 Les Compagnons, in second with a score of 71.5... the London Midlanders. (Euphoria) And in first place with a final score 74.85 The Scarborough Firefighters!" He had also announced earlier that we were the winners of top horn line and M & M. We didn't learn until after retreat that, due to a tabulation error, we had also won top drums - the icing on the cake. STILL one of the greatest days of my life!



Onward and Upward: 1971

OUR SENIOR MARCHING members were in unison – we were done with the Junior “B” ranks. The Provincials, Penn York and Canadian championships led the executive to agree to take the next step. BIG question, were we ready to take on the mighty top three: De La Salle Oaklands, La Salle Cadets and the Optimists who had dominated the category since the mid 60’s? Or, were we to fall by the wayside like so many others before us - the York Lions, the Sertomanaires, Les Metropolitains or the Chessman? The 1971 season was fully committed to the Junior “A” challenge. We had virtually the same veteran line-up, added tympani’s to our drum line and the guard/rifle line was looking sharp under the guidance of Art McCabe.

The season started off in Ottawa where we defeated the Optimists (63.35 to 61.80) for the first time ever. Later that month after a contest at the Borough of York Stadium, a tabulation error (detected by our Corps Director Dick Hubbard) showed that instead of defeating La Salle Cadets we had actually lost. A real kick in the momentum. By the time July came around, the Optimists had overtaken us (69.7 to 69.55). Our performances were strong and we fielded an experienced lineup, but our program just didn’t polish up like the big three. Santa Clara

Vanguard came up for the Canadian Invitational that year and easily won with an 84 to Del’s 78. Opti beat us again, this time 63.3 to 63.250.

The 1971 season in Canada was under a bit of a cloud with accusations of ineligible (overage) players filling some of the

ranks. Try as they might, the CDCA was unable to reign in the troubled sector. The “unofficial” Nationals were called the Junior Invitational and were held on August 29th. It was the only year end contest in which all 6 or 7 Junior “A” Corps competed. Final tally was Del 83.1, Optimists 78.9, La Salle Cadets 75.8 and the Scarborough Firefighters at 72.5. All in all, it was a season of ups and downs for us, but the worst was yet to come.



Contrabasses (1971)
L-R: Tom Gulas, Billy Gale
and Dave Garnett



Scarborough Firefighters (Varsity Stadium, 1971)

1972: The Re-Build

THE 1972 SEASON started with the good news that show designer Jack Roberts had joined our staff. He had a long and successful tenure with the Toronto Optimists back in their heyday. Only one problem – we had a major turnover in personnel. Six or seven age outs to key players, half our rifle line quit or defected, two snare drummers and a bunch of bass drummers quit and we lost our number 2 soloist to Del. There were members who were disappointed we didn't show better in Junior "A" and those who had just had enough.

In all, 40% of the Corps we fielded that summer were rookies. Add to this that our sponsorship by the Firefighters was pulled and a gang of renegade parents

Change name

Corps, seeking sponsor, members

The Scarboro Firefighters Drum and Bugle Corps is dead.

And in its place the Scarborough Princemen Drum and Bugle Corps is born

The group, which will be recruiting new members in a drive Monday night, lost the sponsorship of the Scarboro fire department this year.

The corps' 1971 budget was \$35,000, and the projected costs for 1972 are \$50,000, too high for the fire department.

For now at least, the corps is self-supporting, although it is looking for a sponsor to take on at least part of the cost.

The senior part of the corps won the Ontario Junior A Corps championships this year.

The corps' junior C group is to be known as the Scarborough Knights Drum Corps. Both new names were suggested by corps members.

Firefighters seek sponsor (1972)

disrupted our feeder Corps, the Sparkies, by forming another corps and stealing a number of our key prospects. The Scarborough Princemen were born. Jack had his work cut out for him.



Our repertoire that year started with "Consider Yourself at Home" in which Jack designed what was to be a carnival like atmosphere, Merry-Go-Round and all. I was never so sure we ever pulled it off as he envisioned. Man, if we had only had those players from that '71 team! "Coulda, Shoulda, Woulda".

That winter of 1972 saw the start of negotiations with Seneca College as a potential sponsor of our Corps. In July, the Seneca Board of Governors approved their support through sponsorship and all of the benefits that came with it. A huge gymnasium, field house, use of their buses and practice field were just some of the many benefits we enjoyed. The Seneca Princemen were born.



Scarborough Princemen (Big 10 prelims, Hamilton, 1972)

FEATURE ARTICLE: Firefighters / Princemen (continued)

Our competitive scores were way down from previous years. For example, we were beaten by both the St. John's Girls and Etobicoke Crusaders in an August contest. Let's just say we were a distant fourth place. However, we re-built with a strong team of keeners, had four brand new double tenors from the remnants of the Sparkies (RIP), a new drum instructor in Gerry Helmsley to help Al, a newly minted Drum Major in Linda Purgas and a new sponsor with lots of resources. We were determined to get back in the race!



Scarborough Princemen (1972)



Scarborough Princemen (Nationals prelims, CNE, 1972)



Scarborough Princemen (CNE, 1972)



Scarborough Princemen (CNE, 1972)

1973: Recovery

NEW TO OUR team for the 1973 season were Executives Al Morrison (Director and Brass design), Bob Canning (Director) and Wolfgang Petschke (Director).



Battle hardened sophomores, lots of original “60’s” and even more new recruits (eg John Coull) swelled our ranks during that recovery year to over 90 members (38 horns, 24 flags, eight rifles, 22 percussion and one Drum Major).

We started out that season (score-wise) a little slower than we might have hoped. We were only at a 66 by mid-July and didn’t make the night show at the US Open. We were 5 points behind the Optimists, however we did defeat The Squires of Watkins Glen, 4th Brigade and the Butler Vagabonds in the prelims, three corps who had beaten us in the past. We did manage to win the New York state VFW championship that season.

Some of our repertoire included Mercy Mercy, Man of La Mancha, Slaughter on 10th Avenue and Day by Day. During our second drum feature, Soprano Soloist Johnny Phillips (a member of the DCI Hall

of Fame BTW) was front and center during our rendition of “Big Noise from Winetka”. We became rather famous that season for adapting “Smoke on the Water” into our street beat. Four tymps, four notes – magic.

Speaking of Johnny, he had an unfortunate accident, tripping over a wire and had to have his ankle placed in a walking cast. Seems he and other senior members who shall remain nameless (Bart, Roddy, Me and Billy G. – all of drinking age BTW) were out for some “after hours” social activity when he tripped and hurt himself. We all thought it was rather hilarious and none of us even believed he had actually hurt himself. Trooper that he is, Mr. Phillips performed (cast and all) in the next two or three contests!



John Phillips (1973)



Seneca Princemen (prelims, Canadian Nationals, CNE, 1973)

FEATURE ARTICLE: Firefighters / Princemen (continued)

We finished our season at the Nationals at the CNE on September 2. That was the year of the unprecedented tie for first place in our category. La Salle Cadets and Del ended up with identical 79.6 scores with the Optimists not far behind. The Princemen placed fourth with a score of 71.25.



Seneca Princemen (1973)



Linda Purgas, Drum Major (1973)
Linda was DM from 1972 thru 1975



Seneca Princemen's mellophones (1973)
L-R: Sheldon Kumagai, Brian Reaves and Bill Thomas



Seneca Princemen (prelims, Canadian Nationals, CNE, 1973)

1974: OUR Year!

THIS YEAR WAS going to be different. A returning veteran membership, brand new cadet style uniforms, Ted Key as music/show designer, consultants Gary Pauly as drill design and percussion charts written by Tom Roe - taught by Jimmy Howell. This would be the year to finally get the respect we had always deserved from cross-town rivals Del and Opti.

Our opening presentation featured Tchaikovsky's Marche Slav. The "sliding" side steps performed by our horn line and guard designed by Gary were quite unique at the time. We went into a medley from Tchaikovsky's 1812 which included (as Ted liked to call it "The Dance"), where our eight person rifle line performed a mid-field side to side dance of their own to the Russian Sailor Dance in their newly appointed long black skirts and cavalry boots. This led to the ultimate finale with simulated cannon fire and carillon. Our percussion ensemble was the William Tell Overture.

Some of our many accomplishments that summer included our Class "A" championship at the Butler Invitational. We took Prelims in Toledo, before



Seneca Princemen rifles, "The Dance" (1974)

performing a 'nervous' show in Finals and falling to the eventual winner, the Marquis. We beat the Optimists in June and went head-to-head with them all season long. That is, until August 11 at DCI North happened. After a horrible performance, we lost to both the Optimists and Etobicoke Crusaders! This was a critical juncture in our season and senior membership went "wild", expressing frustration to the executives that we had lost our momentum.

To their credit, our leadership brought in music/brass consultant Mike Duffy to polish up our overall presentation by creating a "wall of sound". De La Salle had finished their season at the DCI finals which made Harry Clark (drums), John Dileo and Tom Furiano (drill) available to help clean up our execution. They even lent us their "mother" bass drum that allowed Jeff Mason to pound out the eight inch howitzer cannon sounds so admirably during our 1812 segment.

Someone started this nasty and malicious rumor that somehow our ranks were supplemented by Del members. I am here to tell you **once and for all** that never happened. We would never risk the rules or our integrity to add a couple of horn players. Thank Mike Duffy (and our



Seneca Princemen (Nationals, 1974)

FEATURE ARTICLE: Firefighters / Princemen (continued)

strong flugelhorn section) for our “new” big sound. That and the return of John Phillips to perform in his final show and the return of (car) injured contra player Greg Molloy to fill out our contra line. That gave us 42 horns, 22 percussion, 22 flags, eight rifles, four color party and two drum Majors for a total of an even 100 Champions.

The Canadian Nationals finally came around at a rainy CNE Stadium. The announcer comes on and says, “in third place with a score of 70.40, the Etobicoke Crusaders... in second place, with a score of 71.55, the Toronto Optimists – EUPHORIA!

And in first place, with a score of 74.80, YOUR Canadian Junior “A” Champions, the Seneca Princemen!



Seneca Princemen (Nationals, 1974)



Seneca Princemen (1974)

1975: The Demise

THERE WAS A very large turnover of personnel after our 1974 Championship. 1975 was a relatively 'dismal year'. Read, 'shades of our former selves'. Thankfully we retained most of our

Guard and Rifle lines. Age outs cost us Tom Gulas, Lambert Mackenze, John Phillips, Bart Sterpanion and me among others.

A basic re-hash from our 1974 repertoire, new instructors Don Cameron (drums) and Tony Cappizano (drill) didn't have much of an impact. There was a consistent 10 point gap between the Princemen and the newly formed amalgam of the Oakland Crusaders and the Optimists which didn't help morale. For instance, the executive decided not to send the Corps to compete at DCI in Philadelphia which did not sit well with veteran/senior members.

The final tally at Nationals pretty much summed up the year: Oakland Crusaders 88.3, Optimists 83.7 and Princemen at 71.5. Such a shame!



Seneca Princemen's Rifles (1975)



Seneca Princemen (1975)

Another Amalgamation In Toronto?

THE “DEVIL” DCI was pretty much dictating how things were going to happen from there on in (eg don’t show up without at least 120 members). The Del/Crusaders amalgamation had resulted in a night show placing for them in 1975, so the “natural” step for the Princemen and Optimists was to pursue a similar action. During the fall of 1975 discussions began between both executives to perform that very task. They had members, we had a sponsor.

I had been gone from Princemen activities for a while, but found myself and other alumni (Paul McCourt, Joni Morton and several others) there to “greet” the Optimists to our field house and welcome our new “partners”. I’ll never forget hearing a bunch of Opti players walking in and saying, “remember think green”. Good start. Optimist Vern Johansen was the first to address the “new” corps. I don’t remember anyone from Princemen speaking.

So that was that. Uniform colors (with a tinge of green) were changed. Prominent Princemen, Dave Phillips, Chris Mabey, Nancy Morris, and a whole bunch of our rifle line and guard, soloist Bill Thomas, Steve Molloy and other brass took their rightful place at the head of the line. A new era.



Bill Thomas in his Seneca Optimists uniform

Epilogue: Who Was The “Better” Champion, 1970 Or 1974?

YOU WILL GET many opinions from the 15 to 20+ veterans who did both “Tours of Duty”. Those would include (and I am going to miss some – so sorry): Guard/Rifles – Nancy Morris, Sandy Coull, Christine and Lucinda Fairbrother, Margaret Thomas... Brass – John Phillips, Doug Coull, Steve Molloy, Bill Thomas, Steve Dunn, Tom Gulas, Lambert Mackenzie, Sheldon Kumagai, Mike Collins, and on Drums – Dave Phillips and Dave Hopkins. In my opinion, 1970 had the better players and 1974 had the better program. There, I said it. CHAMPIONS ALL.

Special thanks to the many contributors to this article. They include alumni Rod Patterson, Paula Renaud, Jeffry Mason, Carol Hepburn, Bill and Kim Thomas. Eric McConachie, Peter McCusker, other photographers and too many historians to name.

This project would not have been completed without the help and guidance of Mr. Bob Carell who kept me on task. Layout specialist Dave Johns who polished the final look of the article with his special touch. Thank you both.

On a personal note, thanks to the many friends we made along with the way like the Pickering Blue Notes, Markham Collegiates, the Arnprior Lions and Carleton Place Marching Saints, La Salle Cadets, General Butler Vagabonds, The Squires of Watkins Glen and the Syracuse Marauders. But, mostly to my brothers and sisters who battled with us throughout our journey. We all wanted the same things – to experience this wonderful thing called Drum Corps!

The scores included throughout this article were accessed through www.dcwmmuseum.org, www.torontooptimistshistory.ca, and the 1974 Canadian National Championship program as published by the CDCA. CHEERS!

A Few More Photo Memories

While gathering material for the article, I ended up with more photos than I could use. The next two pages contain a few of those photos. (Bob)



Seneca Princemen formal photo (1973)



Scarborough Firefighters, soloist Gregg Robinson (Waterloo, 1969)



Seneca Princemen colour guard (Ivor Wynn Stadium, Hamilton, 1973)



Scarborough Firefighters (1967)



Drum Major Harry Francis conducts Scarborough Firefighters (1969)



Scarborough Princemen (Nationals prelims, CNE, 1972)

Chapter 25: The Last Roundup

News about the corps

The 1975 season, for the Optimists, actually began on September 2, 1974. On that date, Doug MacKenzie announced that he had been appointed Corps Director for the coming year. He would replace the over-worked Don Daber. In a short talk, he laid out his plans and vowed that the Corps would be more successful in the year to come. As if to confirm this, during the parades and exhibitions that followed the '74 Nationals, the Corp pulled itself together. A solid unit set for 1975.

Terry McKolsky, who had returned to his original Corps, this one, left again. His various talents and interests kept him on the move. Taking over full control of the bugles was Peter Byrne. He would prove more than capable.



Toronto Optimists (1975)

Jack Roberts and Greg Oxenham returned on drill, which was to be designed by Gary Czapinski. His experience was extensive. He had written, and taught, the drill of the Santa Clara Vanguard, 1974 D.C.I. Champions.

His cohort, Marie Kas, had been with the Norwood Park Imperials for fourteen years. She brought her knowledge to the colour guard, as consultant.

Ron Kaiser was still Chief Drum Instructor. Winter rehearsals were to go well for the bugle line, and it got built up somewhat. The colour guard lacked only numbers during this period. Drums had the numbers but lacked ambition. They did not labour as hard as they might, which would show later in the season. At this time, though, things looked good all around. Maybe, too good!

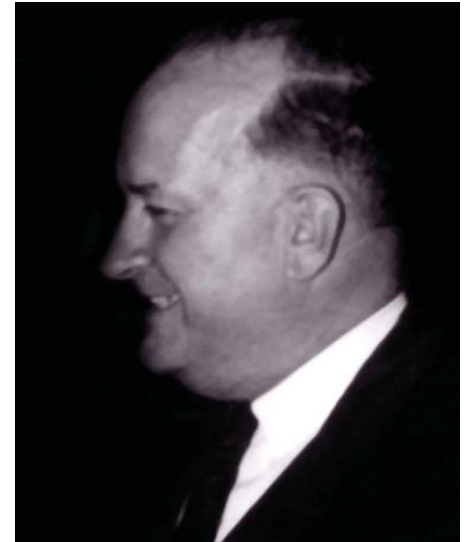
December saw the final meeting of the York-Toronto Optimist Club for 1974. A guest speaker, Mr. Tony Kunz, a realtor, was introduced by Optimist John Bright, and thanked by Optimist Peter Shore, a lawyer. Special guests of Doug MacKenzie were Bud Jemmett and Vic Score, Corps staff members. Club members Rex Martin, Joe Gianna, President, Peter Shore, and Frank Redmond all reported on events past or planned. This club certainly kept things rolling.



Ron Kaiser

New Music

In late December, over the Christmas holiday weekend, the Corps conducted a three-day rehearsal in the Shrine Temple. Although the Shriners no longer were involved with Drum Corps, the Optimists were still allowed to use their facilities. This favourable situation would continue indefinitely. It was owing to Mr. Gord Robinson. He was the recording secretary of the Shrine. More relevant, he was a long-time supporter of the Corps. The long practice was used to learn a new concert. “Indian Lady”, as well as a medley of Judy Garland numbers. Attendance was high. Wayne Downey, of Blue Devils fame, had arranged some of it and made a special trip here to teach all this. The permanent bugle instructor was still Peter Byrne. Gord Robinson was officially thanked for his co-operation.



Gord Robinson

Ron Kaiser, with twenty-seven in his drum line, also had outside assistance. Joe Morello, of Reading Buccaneers, assisted with arrangements.

January saw the first club meeting of the New Year, held at the Holiday Inn on Warden Avenue at Highway 401. This was now the usual meeting place. It was a convivial atmosphere with formal or informal surroundings, as desired, which encouraged people to attend.

One of their ideas, unfolded on January 31st, was an Optimist Alumni reunion at a Masonic Lodge. Well attended, it was somewhat subdued. Many of these people did not know each other as, by now, the existence of the Corps had spanned a couple of generations.

Merging of Cadets and Lancers

Earlier in this month, a decision was enacted. After much soul-searching and consultation with parents, it was determined that the Cadets and Lancers would march together in 1975. If capable, they would enter competition at the Junior “C” level. It would be a trial year. With the two units at opposite ends of the city; the distances involved could work against this.

A decision to either maintain this arrangement or split up again would be made after the 1975 Nationals. The executives of both units had held good rapport and would be twinned all the way. Co-directors would be Ted Baker and Dick Brown. Towards all this, three combined rehearsals had already been held, January 8th, 15th, and 19th. One hundred and ten people were involved. Because it was a trial affair, the name would be “Cadets and Lancers”.



Cadet Lancers

Green Capsule Comments

Drum Corps News columnist, Harvey Berish, had compared “Green Capsule Comments” to some other Corps publications. He concluded that G.C.C. was the one to which he would award the Drum Corps Pulitzer Prize, had one existed, for fine journalism, continuous publication, and overall excellence. This was a tribute to Don Daber. An anniversary issue had just been put out, in the format of a regular tabloid-sized newspaper. It was the fifteenth anniversary. Don Daber was listed as editor, still. He was now ably assisted by the McCusker brothers, with stories by Vern Johansson, Vic Decloux, and John McCullough.

Comments in other publications were revealing. Ian Stott, of Ports of Call in Drum Corps News comments on lack of familiarity of today’s Drum Corps music. A judge says that Scout House was the greatest crowd pleaser of all time. True. No matter where they went, or who was there, they had the crowd. It would happen today if they were still around and good. They were so different.



C.D.C.A.

Symposium 3, the plus annual session of the C.D.C.A. was held from January 31 to February 2, at Howard Johnsons. Bill Ryder was registrar.

The Optimists Club

The Optimist Club of York-Toronto reconvened on February 18, 1975. This was a general meeting, with 23 in attendance. Three new members were inducted by past president, Rex Martin. They were Len Perrin, Doug Yarker and Kevin Martin. A stated goal was for each member to bring in one new one.

This was the scene of “The Great China Experience”, a creation of Peter Shore. An earlier meeting of the club had revealed some picture of the scope of their activities. A planned calendar of events showed a host of ideas that were put into effect.

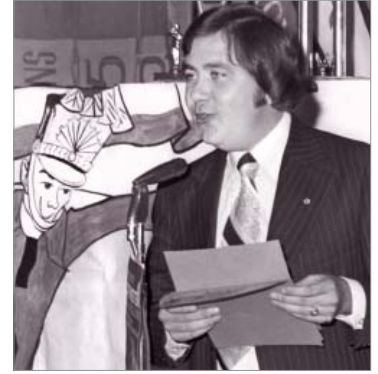
Some were:

- | | |
|--------------|-----------------------------------|
| February 7th | Millionaires Night |
| March 17th | “Wearing of the Green” Dance |
| March 27th | Social Evening – Carlings Brewery |
| April ? | Progressive Euchre |
| May 24th | “Victoria Day” Dance |
| June ? | B.B.Q. |



Len Perrin when he was with the Optimists Alumni (2009)

July ?	Cookout, then to a concert
Aug. ?	Charter Bus to D.C.I. Finals
Sept. 13th	Rummage and Bake Sale Social Evening at East York Curling Club
Oct. ?	Junior Corps 1975 Banquet
Nov. ?	Fall Dance
Dec. ?	“Have a Merry Holiday Season”
January 1976	Party for Junior Corps



*Doug MacKenzie,
Corps Director (1975)*

Most of these events were social and recreational, combined with money raising. This list showed that the York-Toronto Optimist Club was a most effective working organization. As with the original Downtown Optimist Club, there would have been no Corps without them.

De La Salle College drops sponsorship of their Drum Corps

The most startling news of the off-season appeared in the Toronto Star, on February 8th. De La Salle, after 65 years, 17 as a Drum Corps, folded. This was news, indeed! It was an old story. They had, due to their success, outgrown their sponsor, De La Salle College. The school was no longer prepared to foot the bill. Drum Corps, especially good ones, as was De La Salle, can be very expensive to maintain. The school kept the equipment, and it looked as if there would be a big gap on the Canadian Junior scene. It did not happen, as a new entity rose from the ashes. The newly dispossessed members of De La Salle merged with the up and coming Etobicoke Crusaders. De La Salle’s full name had been “De La Salle Oaklands”, so the new Corps became the “Etobicoke Oakland Crusaders” Drum and Bugle Corps. Later to be known as the “Oakland Crusaders, or “Oakies”. A new set of bugles and uniforms were to come, creating a unit distinctive from either of the founding Corps.



Etobicoke Oakland Crusaders (1975)

The Director of the Crusaders, Mr. Bob Duggan, became the Executive Director of the new Corps. Mr. Bob Cobham, former De La Salle Director, would become Co-Director of the Crusaders. The new Corps would become a powerhouse.

This year’s annual C.J.A. award for most improved Drum Corps went to the Peterborough Krescendos. In the future they would play a big part in our unfolding story.

Another club meeting in March saw Al Baggs and Harold Coulson of the Downtown Club present the Corps with a cheque for \$1,000, on behalf of the club. They were special guests, along with several alumnae; Ron Cook, Brian Hogan, Al Lavigne, Rick Robida and Rob Trimble. If we had to list all Corps Alumna, we would need another book.



Peterborough Krescendos

At the same meeting, a treasurer’s report for the York-Toronto Optimist Club showed \$2,000 put in the Junior Corps account for 1975 expenses. Rex Martin, Booster Club President, said \$1,700 from the “Wearing of the Green Dance” would go to the Corps. A suggestion was made that the alumnae could be a source of funds. Maybe, but they were a much looser, more informal group.

In March, the Dutchmen, of Kitchener, Ontario, ran a Colour Guard Contest. Eight units participated. The Optimist Guard placed second with 70.3. A 4.2 penalty did not help but they would not have won anyway. First place went to the Ventures with 79.20.

An Optimist directory was now almost a necessity to keep track of all operations. They were, at this time:

Optimist Club of York-Toronto

President: Joe Gianna

Secretary Treasurer: Frank Redmond

Optimist Cadets/Lancer Drum and Bugle Corps

Directors: Ted Baker, Dick Brown

Optimist Cadets Booster Club

President: Dalton Moore

Toronto Optimists Drum and Bugle Corps

Director: Doug MacKenzie

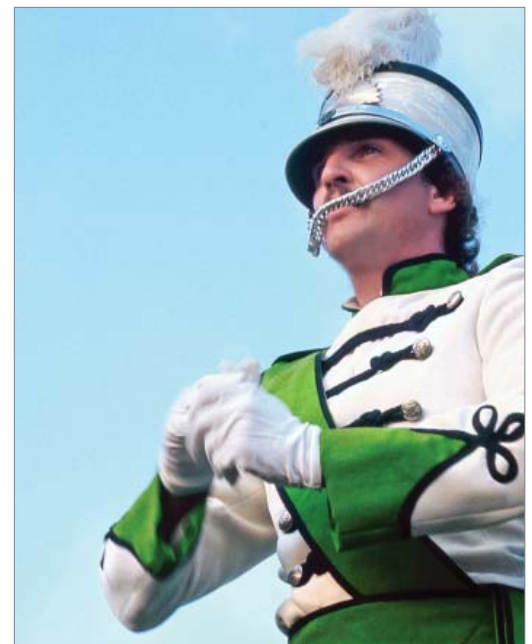
Assistant Director, Treasurer: Bernie White

Toronto Optimist Booster Club

President: Rex Martin

Green Capsule Comments/Publicity

Don Daber



Peter Byrne steps in as Drum Major (1975)

All this organization had but one mutual object, to put the Corps on the field every year. Dominion Store tapes now went to Bud Jemmett. Canadian Tire Store coupons were collected to help with equipment truck upkeep. A Mr. McCullough was to be called if anybody had items for a rummage sale.

Seneca Princemen

A preview of other competition showed that the 1974 champions, the Seneca Princemen, had a full slate of instructors. On brass was Ted Key and Myron Melnyk. Mr. Key went as far back as 1956 with the Danforth Crusaders, then the Toronto Optimists. Mr. Melnyk was a De La Salle alumna. Tony Capizzano, Bob Stone, and Tom Furiano were on drill. John Cameron and Rick Hogan handled percussion.



Seneca Princemen (1974)

An effective executive included:

Wolfgang Petschke	Director
John Henderson	Assistant Director
Les Hopkins	Secretary Treasurer
Ron Smith	Business Manager
Eric Ellis	Assistant Business Manager
Julia N. Martin	Publicity and Public Relations

Others were Gus Lemon, June and Frank Blakeney and John Johnson. This Corps wanted continued success.

Other News

At the C.D.C.A. National Individual Championship, the Optimist Bugle sextet was a favourite with both the crowd and the judges. They won the prelims and the night finals. Duet rifle won the prelims, but lost the finals to Seneca. Susan Sklar won the individual rifle at the finals. A snare drum duet, Jim Stevenson and Mike O'Connor won their category, prelims and finals. Mr. Stevenson won individual snare. Such talents boded well for the general Corps future.



Toronto Optimists drums rehearsing (1975)

The Optimists had formed a circuit guard this year, as distinct from the Junior Corps colour guard. It consisted of 12 flags with 6 rifles, and was captained by Cheryl Blandford. Greg Oxenham was the guard instructor.

Some letters in G.C.C. were interesting

One, from a girl, complained that girls were not invited to the alumnae reunion on January 31st. It was signed “left out girl in the guard”. Many of the alumnae had served in the Corps, and left it, long before girls were in. If some of this group were the reunion organizers, it could explain this omission.

A thank you note was sent to the Junior Corps Booster Club, on behalf of the executive and membership of the Corps of 1975. It expressed the gratitude of all for a terrific evening at the March “Wearing of the Green” Dance. The authors were Doug MacKenzie and the executive of the Toronto Optimists.

Tuesday, May 27th saw the 2nd “Special Dinner Meeting”. These were designed to add spice to meetings, which, had they been all business, could have become tedious. This time, the club had an “Italian Night”, held at an Italian sidewalk café. All procedures were observed, guest speaker being Dr. Gordon Stewart, past moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Canada.

This was a “good” club. Optimist Peter Shore thanked him for his effort. The club now had charitable licences, listed as “The Optimist Youth Development Foundation”. People who made cash contributions could now use a charitable licence number to claim tax credits.

The Ways and Means Committee was now headed by Len Perrin and Doug Yarker. Other members included Ross Cation, Jack Roberts, Ron Cook and Richard Robida. All of the people were former marching members, some as far back as 1958 and before.

Events in May, before the opening of the season, saw the Corps in concert at Birchmount Collegiate. The crowd was not as large as expected, but all monies made were turned over to the Corps.

May 17th-19th, using car pools, the Corps took off to Flesherton, Ontario, for a work camp weekend. It was considered a roaring success. Competition was less than a month away.

Less of a roaring success was a “get acquainted” dance at East York Curling Club. It was for parents and friends to get acquainted with those involved in helping the Corps year round. Only 27 parents showed up.



Toronto Optimists (1975)



Toronto Optimists (1975)

The Competition Season

The biggest unanswered question this year had to be “How would the new Corps, the Oakland Crusaders, stack up?” It would soon be answered.

Welland

The Rose Festival in Welland, Ontario, on June 7th was the first meeting of the Optimists and the Oakland Crusaders. The Optimists had progressed, uninterrupted, over the winter, carrying on as usual. The new Corps, however, had not really begun to get underway until March, after the merger took place and things were organized. So, although they were expected to be good, the results of this first outing were not entirely unexpected.

1st	Toronto Optimists	68.40
2nd	Oakland Crusaders	65.35
4th	Seneca Princemen	52.50
5th	Peterborough Krescendos	45.40



Oakland Crusaders (1975)

The Optimists bugle line scored 3.55 over the Oakland Corps, showing that they had not been idle while the Crusaders won drums, both captions. This showed that the Optimist line, always a strong point, had maybe relaxed a bit over the winter. Drums were, though, to become a strong point of the Oakland Corps. Both were even on marching and maneuvering. So the big difference was on bugles. And size. The Crusaders were a big corps with forty-eight horns and twenty-nine drums dressed in striking, new, blue uniforms. The Optimists had thirty-nine horns and twenty-seven drums. The horns were excellent while the drums were only down 0.5 and 0.3 in execution and general effect, respectively.

The merger of De La Salle and Etobicoke had not yet produced the superior Corps expected. Yet. The Optimists, though better prepared, were not near peaking. Yet. The Seneca Corps had, as of now, a long way to go. However, the season was just beginning and much could happen. It should be very interesting.

A week later, they were at it again.

Waterloo, June 14th

1st	Toronto Optimists	72.80
2nd	Oakland Crusaders	72.65
3rd	Seneca Princemen	62.70



Toronto Optimists (1975)

Same placings, but with scores much closer. Comments already making the rounds were: “Optimists great! Like the Corps of old! Horn line ranks with the all time Optimist greats. Drum line large and proficient.”

However, partly because of this, and the fact that they had started well and were new, the Oakland Crusaders were eliciting most general interest.

Next, in Ajax, June 24th

Ajax

For the Optimists, this was “jinx town, looser city”. In four years they had yet to win this town. So it remained. The Oakland Crusaders won their first contest, downing the Optimists for the first time in the process, 72.10 to 71.75. After a week of poor rehearsals, the Optimists came up with a hot show back in Toronto. They turned the tables, upsetting the Crusaders 77.65 to 76.35. All these scores, this early, were indecisive; however, it was starting to look as if, in Canada, this would be a “two Corps” season.

After the Ajax show, everybody from the Optimist camp went to a B.B.Q. in Morningside Park, in Scarborough. It was a great evening, with great weather, lots of food, and over two hundred in attendance, members, parents, friends, etc.



Oakland Crusaders (1975)

Tour One

Both Corps under discussion now departed on tours in the USA. For the Optimists, this was known as tour one, and lasted from July 3rd to July 6th. Leaving Toronto on July 2nd, the next day saw them in Racine, Wisconsin. This, as always, was a different league and the Corps was not totally ready. Regardless, they acquitted themselves well, placing fourth, seven points behind the Racine Kilties, in first. A score of 62.75 put them three and a half over the once unbeatable Casper Troopers.

Next day, there were two parades. It was July 4th, American Independence Day. This was in Columbus, Wisconsin, and an improvement was recorded. In third place were the Optimists, now nine points out of first, which was held by the Royal Crusaders (not the Oakland Crusaders). Strange business this. Or was it?



Toronto Optimists (1975)

After a stay over in Columbus, it was on to Manitowoc. During the parade, the Corps was cheered. After the contest, the judges were booed. Royal Crusaders, with 72.45, were first, over Kilties, over Phantom Regiment and over the Optimists. Way back in fourth, the Optimists had 64.9. From here, west to Appleton, Wisconsin, it was the same story. Fourth, with the Kilties over the Royal Crusaders, in first, eight points over the Optimists, who had put on their best show thus far. Thankfully, it was now back to Toronto.

This tour had been a mirror image of many previous Midwest jaunts. Loved by the crowds, but not so favourable with the judges. Well, what can you do? Grin and bear it!

The Oakland Crusaders did not break any records on their tour either. A 66.75 in Alton, Illinois and, ominously a 73.6 in Michigan City, Indiana. This gave them second and third places, respectively. They were improving, so the next meeting of the two Canadian rivals should prove more than just interesting.



Toronto Optimists (1975)

The last Canadian contest for the Optimists had been in Brantford on July 1st, before the tour. They had won an easy victory, eighteen points over the Peterborough Krescendos. Their score of 74.90 showed a marked decrease from their last outing in Canada.

Now, loomed the first meeting between the Optimists and the Oakland Crusaders since both had been on tour. It was at Birchmount Stadium in Scarborough, as good a field as anywhere. This new version of an old rivalry, Optimist vs De La Salle, had sparked a lot of interest and over two thousand people were in attendance. In Canada, especially for a non-championship contest, this was a lot.

Birchmount Stadium

What they saw was not totally unexpected.

1st	Oakland Crusaders	81.00
2nd	Toronto Optimists	78.10
3rd	Seneca Princemen	69.10
4th	Peterborough Krescendos	56.35

The Crusaders had opened up a three-point gap, with top scores on drums and bugles. Their bigger size helped, plus the fact that after the late start they were now beginning to gel. The Optimists



Oakland Crusaders (1975)

were not finished yet, by a long shot. It was seen, though, that things would not be easy from here on in. When had they ever been? Evening during their long unbeaten streaks, it had always required maximum effort to keep them intact.

On to Toledo

After this, it was three weeks until the next contest, in Toledo, Ohio. Things did not slide, although it could have been a vacation. The old spirit showed as turnouts for rehearsals were good, rehearsals were consistent. When they went, there were no bus problems, as had plagued tour one.

The name of the contest was the “Key to the Sea”, somewhat unusual considering Toledo’s location. However, much in Drum Corps is unusual, so maybe this was unusually usual. Significantly, this contest would be the first meeting outside of Canada, of the Optimists and Oakland Crusaders. Neutral territory.

Toledo, Ohio – August 2nd

Open Class Prelims

Here, that rarity in Drum Corps, a tie for first place. The Crusaders (Oakland) tied the Crusaders (Royal), each scoring 79.05. Our group was back in second with 75.55, just maintaining the pace vis-à-vis the Oakland Crusaders. The night finals, however, would tell a different story.

Oakland, it appeared, were improving each time out and there were no tie scores this time.

1st	Oakland Crusaders	81.45
2nd	Royal Crusaders	79.45
3rd	Toronto Optimists	75.10

The pattern emerging here was that everybody was moving ahead; however, the Oakland Corps were moving ahead at a greater rate. The Optimists were seen to be gradually slipping behind. Oddly, the Optimist night show was much better than their afternoon show, but their score went down. At night, the Crusaders were described as “deadly”, meaning accurate. Their lead was now over six points. An effect of this “downer” was that at the next contest stop, Cleveland, Ohio, everybody, instructors included, was on each other’s backs. A tight rehearsal preceded the trip, in uniform, to the stadium, where the rain let loose.



Finleyville Royal Crusaders

Relaxing in the dressing room, the Corps loosened up, to good effect. Came the sun, and the Optimists went out and put on their best show of the year so far. Although the Oakland Crusaders were still ahead, the margin was now a much slimmer two points.

Now it was back to Toronto, with the “bugle” bus arriving first. The other one was delayed due to a station wagon breakdown. Not considered a tour, this trip had seen the Corps start to pull up.

Tour Two

North Tonawanda

Now, it was off on the official “tour two”. It began in North Tonawanda, NY, on August 12th. There was another bus breakdown, before leaving Toronto, delaying what should have been a 6:30 a.m. departure until 8:00 a.m. Due to this, the Corps arrived at the stadium just in time to change for the contest. A consequence of this, along with over confidence, was the worst performance of the year. This was still enough to gain third place, with a score of 75.00; however, this was the preliminaries. A good horn rehearsal and doing the show a few times amounted to good preparation for the night show. And what a show it turned out to be!

Adequate preparation paid big dividends with championship form, drive, spirit, execution and excitement. All these elements combined to bring the crowd to their feet. It also brought the Optimists first place with 83.50. Finally they were starting to get into the higher scores. This Corps was far from finished, showing spirit reminiscent of other days. If they could maintain this, anything could happen. What



Toronto Optimists (1975)

better place to test one’s resolve than the next show, the now accepted “Holy Grail” of modern Drum Corps, D.C.I. Nationals, Philadelphia.

DCI, Philadelphia, USA

Valley Forge – Sheraton Hotel. A fabulous place to stay. Certainly better than when George Washington had wintered his Continental army there. As far as Drum Corps were concerned, its drawback was that you could not practice there. The next day, August 14th, saw the corps, somehow, somewhere, conduct an all-day rehearsal. This was appropriate, as they were entered in the prelims on Friday, the 15th. At this, now “THE” contest, they were on second. From a great show only days earlier, they did not perform as they were expected. Drive, which was needed to push them into the eighties, was lacking. That, and a low drum score, gave them a score of 75.0. Nobody could figure out why this had happened.

Don Whiteley, D.C.I. Publicity Director, was seen talking to Doug MacKenzie, Director, and other members of the Optimist executive. As a result of these discussions, the Corps walked a few blocks from the stadium to the Philadelphia Sick Children’s Hospital. They had been asked, and agreed, to do a show for the critically ill kids.

Some of these were mentally and physically challenged. Some were even near death. The Corps had to play softly because they were only five feet from their audience, on a cramped balcony. After this good deed, it was back to the hotel to change out of uniform. This done, most of the Corps returned to the stadium to see the rest of the prelims. They were now in eleventh place. Only twelve made it to the finals.

Saturday saw the Corps practising again, in expectation of further competition. Until, that is, a fateful phone call informed them that they were out of the finals, beaten out by the Precisionaires. The Optimists had beaten them before, four times, and each time by not less than ten points. This was an indication of their unsteady performance at the preliminaries.

Regardless, the Corps returned to the stadium to watch the night finals. These shows are too good to miss. Sunday saw them packed and ready to return home. A meeting was held with Doug MacKenzie and the executive.



Toronto Optimists warming up (Brantford, 1975)

Talk was of the 1976 season, even though this one was not yet over. In Canada, anyway. Jack Watt, the Business Manager, said he was pleased with the conduct of the Corps, as was the hotel. D.C.I. Nationals were now over. Optimists had jumped from 34th in 1974 to 16th where they had finally ended up this year. If it was any consolation, this was a bigger jump than anyone else had made.

Etobicoke

Wednesday, August 20th – Etobicoke

With both Corps doing a poor show, the Crusaders nipped the Optimists by four full points. At the Ontario Championships, 3 days later, Crusaders extended their lead over Optimists to almost 7 points.

1st	Oakland Crusaders	84.55
2nd	Toronto Optimists	77.85

One Week to Nationals

A letter was received from the “Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia”. It expressed the thanks of the “Children’s Activity Department Play Therapy Program” for the show put on by the Corps. It said that the children had loved the music, costumes, and seeing a “parade” in a hospital.



Oakland Crusaders (1975)

At the D.C.I. finals, the Oakland Crusaders had placed sixth. Maybe this was why the Optimists had been talking about 1976 after their elimination. D.C.I. finals were to become an accepted indication of how the Canadian Nationals would turn out. Maybe it already was. This year, and often, subsequently, this was the case.

The Optimists had started this year on top. They had been going strong all winter and had been in good shape at the start of the season. Oakland Crusaders had not really got underway until March, after getting all the details of the merger ironed out. De La Salle had not folded until February. This union of two Corps, one a very promising up and comer, the other a well established powerhouse, had no chance to fail under the proper leadership. That leadership was present. Once this entity had got things in gear, they began to improve in leaps and bounds. They had the talent, instructors and executive. Their rate of improvement had been visually and audibly apparent to all observers. Along with this, their show was one of the most pleasing anywhere.

The Optimists, at times mediocre, at times brilliant, never bad, had shown an unusual inconsistency. This was a flaw often ascribed to others during Optimists days of supremacy. Whatever, it is not a good quality to ensure success. When the Oakland machine picked up steam, the Optimists could not catch them. Even though, at times, they pulled themselves very close.



The Seneca Princemen, small in size, defending champions, were an example of what was now, maybe always, had been a major factor. Size. With thirty horns and eighteen drums, they could hardly hope to win against two bigger, equally good or better, units. This factor worked against the Optimists as well. They were big enough to entertain hopes of ultimate victory, but in a toss up between equality of other factors, size would a negative. As it was, the larger Corps was better, so such a theory was not put to the test.

1975 Nationals

Although the Optimists must have put on one of their best shows of the season, scoring an 84 at Nationals, they could not upset the odds. In this, for once, general opinion was confirmed. If they, and others, notably the Seneca Princemen, wished to survive and prosper in the future, something would have to be done. Something drastic.

The run down of the 1975 Nationals was as follows.

1st	Oakland Crusaders	88.30
2nd	Toronto Optimists	83.70
3rd	Seneca Princemen	71.45
4th	Krescendos	62.25

These results, for the Optimists, probably held no surprises; it was why, after D.C.I. they were talking about 1976, not the Nationals. If true, it was a mood that would reappear, thus making the Canadian Nationals somewhat of an anti-climax.

“From Toronto... The Optimists!” by Colin Hedworth. Chapter 25. (continued)

Below is a brief chart of Optimist scores throughout the year. Inconsistency, to some degree, is evident throughout.

Welland 68.40	Appleton.....66.80	Waterloo72.80	Birchmount78.10
Ajax..... 71.50	Toledo75.10	York.....77.65	Cleveland77.50
Brantford 74.00	Tonawanda83.50	Racine.....62.00	Philadelphia....75.60
Columbus ... 65.85	Etobicoke80.50	Manatowac64.90	London77.85
Nationals 83.70			

The Cadets had prospered this year, and, with the people involved, this is no great surprise. Some of them were:

Al Tierney	Cathy McPherson	Coleen Deoni	Doug MacKenzie
Gord O’Halloran	Gus Morin	Guy Vezina	Jessie Baker
Jim Dynes	John O’Leary	Les Gaudar	Marlene Trace
Nancy Hanselman	Ron Deoni	Ted Baker	Vic Decloux



Drum Majors on retreat (Nationals, Waterloo, 1975)

Corps Banquet

Regardless of the year and its outcome, there was always the annual banquet. This one was the fourteenth. Gord Robinson was emcee and introduced the head table. Bud Jemmett introduced the guest speaker, none other than that genial giant, doer of good works, local celebrity, Lord Athol Layton. He related his past involvement in Drum Corps, via the Shrine, and indicated an interest in further activity in this field.

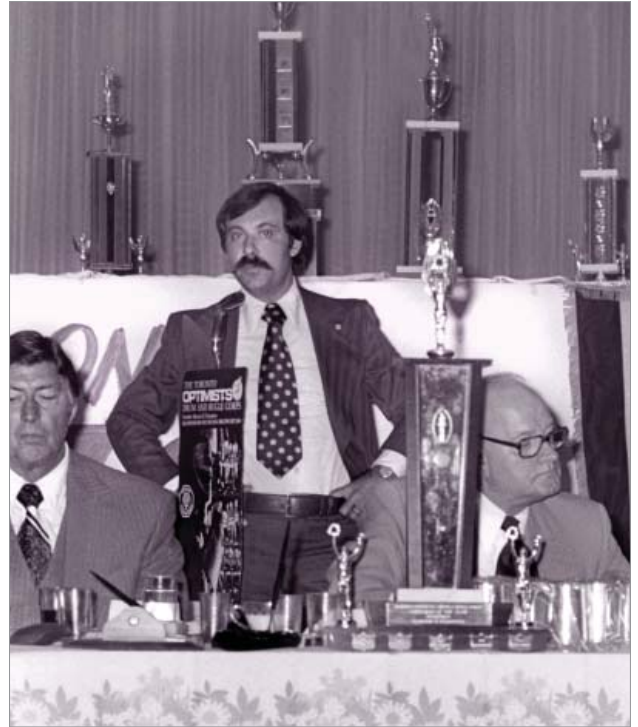
Joe Gianna reviewed some of the club activities and issued an invitation to those now over twenty-one, no longer in the Corps, to consider membership. He then presented Corps rings.

Doug MacKenzie spoke about the season past and its success, which really it was. The corps was better than 1974, losing only to an unknown quantity. Plans included more exposure to big American Corps, beating the blue band more often, and new uniforms. This last would come about, but not quite in the way he had in mind at this time.

Gord Robinson brought back the famous “21” mugs and gave two to Bernadette Schliebel and Barry Woods. They were now over 21. Unfortunates? Or were they? They would be back. Other recipients were Calvin Johansson and mighty McCusker.

George Nasello presented a silver service tray to Mr. and Mrs. Sciore, Vic and Flo. Nobody could have been worthier, his or her service having been long, hard, relentless, and unstinting. It would continue for a long time yet. They were two of the most worthy people throughout the life of the Optimists.

The current C.D.C.A. secretary-treasurer made some remarks, and Al Tierney, eloquent fellow that he was, made a good, off the cuff, speech. President Rex Martin, of the Booster Club, presented a cheque for \$1,500, raised over the past few months by rummage sale, dance, etc. The club certainly lived up to its name. He also presented pins to thirty-six rookies.



Lord Athol Layton, Joe Gianna (Club President) and Gord Robinson (Awards Banquet, 1975)



George Nasello with Flo and Vic Sciore (Corps Banquet, 1975)

“From Toronto... The Optimists!” by Colin Hedworth. Chapter 25. (continued)

G.C.C. awards of merit, of its 15th anniversary, went to the more active 1975 staff. Other awards went to certain Corps members, no doubt for contributions. Last, but not least, Doug MacKenzie was given a “This is my last year” certificate. Joking aside, he was a long, long, time member of the Optimist clan. He had been the superb soprano soloist in 1962’s the “Party’s Over”.

The now traditional awards were presented.

- Rookie of the Year..... Shaun Watt
- Guard Award Eileen MacKinnon
- Most Improved Bugler..... Alan Gillies (soprano)
- Corpsman of the Year..... Dave MacKinnon (mellophone)

To begin fund raising again, already (did it ever stop?), Mr. Robinson had a \$100 hamper of perfume and junk to be drawn for that evening. At \$1.00 a ticket, sold by the girl guard, well over \$100 was raised. It was a good beginning.

Winding down, a Corps film of 1975 Nationals was shown. To close the proceedings, a dance was held and a good time was had by all.

With that, the year and, no doubt, the Corps was laid to rest!



Dave Mackinnon and Mike Arsenault (Awards dinner, 1975)



Optimist Cadet Awards: Lynn Oram, Guard-of-the-Year; Lynda Baillie, Cadet-of-the-Year; Bob Moore, Section-of-the-Year; George Price, Drummer-of-the-Year; Victor Decloux, Bugler-of-the-Year and Pat Tunney, Rookie-of-the-Year



Optimists Bass Drums: Steve O'Connor, Steve Shimski, Ric Brown, Don McDonald, Peter Price (1975)

The 1975 Toronto Optimists



Toronto Optimists (1975)



Toronto Optimists (1975)



Toronto Optimists (1975)



Toronto Optimists Formal photo (1975)

A few Scores for the Toronto Optimists and some of our competitors as the summer of **1975** progressed

Contest ► Corps Name ▼	Welland (June 7)	Ajax (June 21)	Racine WI (July 3)	Manitowoc WI (July 5)	DCI Prelims (Aug 15)	Canadian Nationals (Sept 7)
Toronto Optimists	68.40	71.75	62.75	64.90	75.60	83.70
Oakland Crusaders	65.35	72.10			86.20	88.30
Seneca Princemen	52.50					71.45
Krescendos	45.40					62.25
Casper Troopers			59.20		79.60	
Kilties			69.40	72.15	83.05	
Phantom Regiment			67.95	70.25	81.95	
Royal Crusaders			69.30	72.50	84.85	

**For a list of scores for this or other years, go to our website:
<https://www.TorontoOptimistsHistory.ca/>**

Chapter 26: 1976 – An End and A Beginning

News on the Drum Corps front

A survey of all seasonal events and parades in the Toronto area showed that all three major Junior Corps were alive and well – Oakland Crusaders, Toronto Optimists and the Seneca Princemen.

These were, now, the three main Canadian Junior “A” Corps. La Salle Cadets and Metropolitains had, like a host of others over the years, departed the scene. Soon, though, another very powerful group was to emerge from a remote area of Quebec.



LaSalle Cadets (Nationals, CNE, 1973)

The current champion, Oakland Crusaders, was not fielding a competitive guard this year. In fact, it was not known if any shows at all would be held this year. The Optimists had added Tom Furiano to work with their colour guard. He was a De La Salle graduate and had worked with their guard and that of the Seneca Princemen.

The Cadet/Lancers, now of Etobicoke, had received Ontario Lottery (Wintario) grants for the purchase of new instruments and uniforms. Years later, such government largesse would dry up, due to tight, if necessary, financial readjustments.

Although D.C.I. was now the major player on the scene, its worthy predecessors, the V.F.W. and American Legion, still played an effective role in Drum Corps. The American Legion Nationals for 1976 were slated to be held from August 20th to 22nd, in Seattle, Washington. It was their 51st year of National drum corps competition. Without these two organizations, it's possible that there would be no Corps today.



Blessed Sacrament Golden Knights, after an attempted revival as a Senior Corps, were finally laid to rest. Forever. In January of 1976, Scout House was to be revived. This was one of several attempts before final demise. This one lasted for a while, as they were seen in parades.

Al Tierney was elected President of the C.D.C.A. for the 1976-77 season. He was a real workhorse. The super workhorse, Don Daber, was re-elected as Vice-President. Mr. Tierney, whose Corps career has already been briefly outlined, was a University of Toronto graduate with wartime army service. He was married with children, two of whom were responsible for him getting involved with drum corps. In December of 1975 he had left St. Johns Girls of Brantford. More relevant to our story was that he had been appointed Director of the Optimists for the 1976 competitive season. Retrospect shows that he was a good person to have around, to oversee all the changes that were in the offing.

Dick Brown, founder of the Etobicoke Lancers, had been elected Etobian of the week. This award, well intentioned, hardly reflects his work. He put together the Junior “C” championships, founded the Lancers and oversaw its development. Like Al Baggs, he had started in Scouting, playing in the Toronto Region Scout Trumpet Band. Also like Al Baggs, he got hooked on Drum and Bugle Corps. He was a founding member of the Midtowners Drum Corps in 1956. Later, he founded the Golden Monarchs, another Corps, under the North York Lions Club. He was Monarchs’ Corps Director in 1962, and National Secretary of the C.D.C.A. In 1968, he became Treasurer of the Toronto Optimists. Shortly after, in the fall of 1969, he founded the Lancers. There is more, but I think you get the picture.



Dick Brown

The C.D.C.A. award of merit this year went to John Robins. He had been associated with Drum Corps for over twenty years. Awarded at the Annual C.D.C.A. “Symposium”, Don Daber had been the first recipient. Other news from this August gathering was that Vince Macciocchi would remain as Chief Judge. New Caption Chief, bugles, would be Mr. Peter Brown while the new Caption Chief, percussion, would be Ron Kaiser. Jack Roberts held his post on M&M, while Larry Blondell retained his position for colour guards. A decision made was that D.C.I. age rules would now apply regarding Canadian Nationals.

Toronto Optimists and Seneca Princemen merge

All of this news, interesting and relevant as it is, was overshadowed by the major news of 1976. Brought about by a chance remark, its ramifications were extensive. This was the merger of the Toronto Optimists Drum and Bugle Corps and the Seneca Princemen Drum and Bugle Corps. One immediate effect, of course, meant that there was now one less Corps on the scene.

Background

The beginning of all this had its roots in 1975. Al Tierney and Wolfgang Petschke, directors of the Optimists and Princemen, while watching a show, observed that without size no Corps had much of a chance of getting anywhere. From there, it was a short step to discussing a merger. Many details had to be ironed out, politically as well as technically.

These Corps were considered two of the best in Canada and each had earned these considerations because of its own traditions and methods. All this had to be reconciled. It turned out to be much easier than might have been imagined.

The Optimists held 12 Canadian National titles, 4 International titles, and 10 Ontario titles. They were the only Corps, ever, to win 11 consecutive National titles.

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175 youth band together

A MERGER OF CHAMPIONS

Two of the best drum and bugle corps in Canada merged on February 8. The Toronto Optimists, sponsored by The Optimist Club of York Toronto and The Seneca Princemen, sponsored by The Seneca College of Applied Arts and Technology.

The Optimists were Canada's most successful drum corps. Between 1958 and 1972 they captured 12 Canadian National championships, four international titles and 10 Ontario championships. They were the only drum corps in North America to win 11 National championships consecutively. They amassed well over 100 major competitive achievements during the 1960's.

The Seneca Princemen, formed in 1961 as the Scarborough Freighters Boys Trumpet Band, won National titles at three different levels—Novice class in 1965, Junior B class in 1970 and Junior A in 1974. They were also Class A American International Champions in 1974. They became known as The Seneca Princemen in 1973 when Seneca College became their sponsor.

With the merger, the new organization will be known as The Seneca Optimists. They will be jointly sponsored by Seneca College and The Optimist Club of York Toronto.

Rehearsals begin immediately for the 1976 season with 175 members, all under the age of 21.



The Seneca Princemen have joined forces with the Toronto Optimists in what could prove to be another successful Canadian merger. (DCW photo by Peter McCusker)

Because of present economic trends and the soaring costs of operating a competitive drum corps, it became necessary to merge for economic stability. The cost of financing a top ranking drum corps runs from \$50,000 to \$100,000 per year.

The merger will form a large talent pool of marching members, instructors and management that will afford the Seneca Optimists the opportunity of competing throughout North America on an equal basis with the best corps in the U.S., something no Canadian corps has ever been able to do consistently.

Separately, The Optimists and The Seneca Princemen would have been able to remain at their existing level of proficiency. But it would have become increasingly more difficult and costly for each of them to gain international prominence. Together, they stand an excellent chance.

This is the era of drum corps as a business. And in business only the best product survives.

The Seneca Optimists have been born to survive.

The Seneca Princemen also had an imposing history. Formed in 1961, as the Scarborough Firefighters Trumpet Band, they had worked up to a Drum Corps. They had outdone most other units by winning National titles at three levels. Novice Class in 1965, Junior “B” Class in 1970, and Junior “A” Class in 1974. In 1972, Seneca College became their sponsor. They hence had their own long, proud tradition.

In some quarters, this was regarded as a takeover of one Corps by a bigger Corps. Had it been seen as such, it would not have worked as well as it did, with executive and members of both units meshing almost immediately and working smoothly, together. There was some dissatisfaction, which resulted in a falling away of some people. This is almost inevitable. We saw it in 1958 with the Optimist Trumpet Band and Danforth Crusaders. Eventually, on February 8th, after much planning, politicking, and maneuvering, here is how things settled.

Sponsorship, Instructors, etc.

This would be: The Seneca Optimists Drum and Bugle Corps, Toronto, Ontario Canada. Headquarters and main indoor rehearsal place, Seneca College, Don Mills, Ontario.

Corps Director

Allan J. Tierney

Assistant Director

Wolfgang Petschke

Sponsors

Seneca College of Applied Arts & Technology
The Optimist Club of York-Toronto Inc.

Publicity

Don Daber

Instructors

Program Co-Ordinator	Gary “Chops” Czapinski
Bugles	Peter Byrne, Myron Melnyk
Percussion	Sam Kays, Al Murray, Pat Irvine
Guard Co-Ordinator	Marie Kas
Silks	Wendy Paquin
Rifle Instructor	Debbie Miller
Drill	Gord Oxenham, Tom Furiano, Gilles Paquin
Drum Majors	Mike Williams, Dawn Canning
Colour Guard Captain	Laura King

Marching Members:

	128
Bugles	58
Percussion	30
Colour Guard	26 flags, 10 rifles
National Colours	2
Commanders	2



Seneca Optimists' first rehearsal (1976)



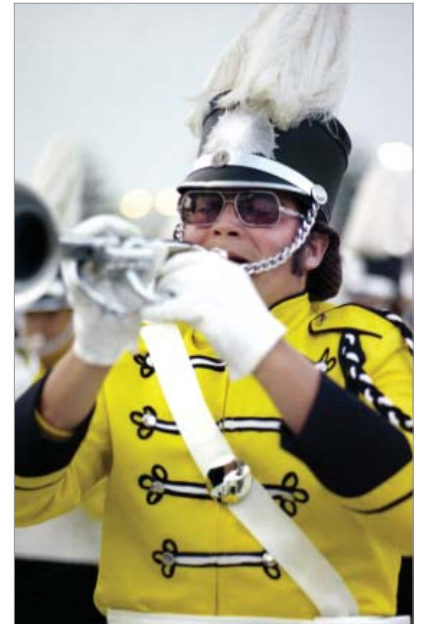
Al Tierney, Corps Director

There it was, the new Corps. Marching members, instructors, executive, all of them experienced. Could this big new Corps challenge the one year older Corps across town? Could it make inroads into previously uncharted territory? We shall see. Anybody, who is aware of the local Corps scene, as it existed at the time, can see that the names listed are heavily in favour of the Optimists. This is true, and helped reinforce the rumour of a takeover. However, to the best of my knowledge, all of the Seneca people stayed, were used, and proved to be invaluable. The lack of friction was evident from the beginning, as the new unit, from day one, got down to work.

A Distinct Uniform

What helped all this to happen was the selection of a uniform distinct from that of either of the founding Corps. A brilliant yellow, cadet-style uniform, replaced the green of the Optimists and the red of the Princemen. If any tears were shed, they were not evident.

What was evident was a common desire to get on with it, win Nationals, make D.C.I. These goals fuelled the machine and inspired the events of the next few years.



Marc Decloux in corps' uniform

The Author and the Equipment Department

We have left out one important, if subsidiary, detail. The equipment department. Mr. Evert Botterweg took the people that he needed from both Corps, moulding them into the kind of instrument that he wanted. He had been with the Optimists for many years, as had, his wife, Doreen. This couple brought with them to this new creation extensive knowledge and experience.

One more item before we move on. In 1975, your author returned to Drum Corps. I would often go to watch the Optimists, my old Corps, practice and, in the process, became familiar with some of them. At first I knew no one. Eventually, I became acquainted with Mr. Evert Botterweg. Evert said that if I was going to come out as often as I did, I might as well come and work for them. I agreed, and thus, thirteen years after leaving, I was back at it. Due to all the changes, it was almost a whole new ball game, with much to be learned. So, this was how I got to be in at the start of the Seneca Optimists. And I was also in at the start of the Toronto Optimists. Then, as now, I was an eyewitness, so for the rest of our tale, we shall have this to aid us.



Back: Doug Coull, Tim Burrage

Front: Barry Woods, Gilles Paquin, Bob Carell, Colin Hedworth, Evert Botterweg, John Konstantinou, Chuck Sokoll

Corps Schedule, Music, etc

Awaiting this Corps was an impressive schedule. It included two exhibitions, four parades, and twenty-five contests, thirteen of them in the United States. Mr. Tierney, like Mr. Baggs of yesteryear, plunged his Corps right into the thick of it.

From the first day, there was much enthusiasm. Since attendance at winter and spring rehearsals averaged 90% the program moved forward at a fast pace. Numbers even grew a bit, as others, from outside, were attracted. Anyone could join; you did not have to be from either of the original Corps.

The music, reflecting current trends, was a few long numbers tilted toward classical, semi classical, and popular.

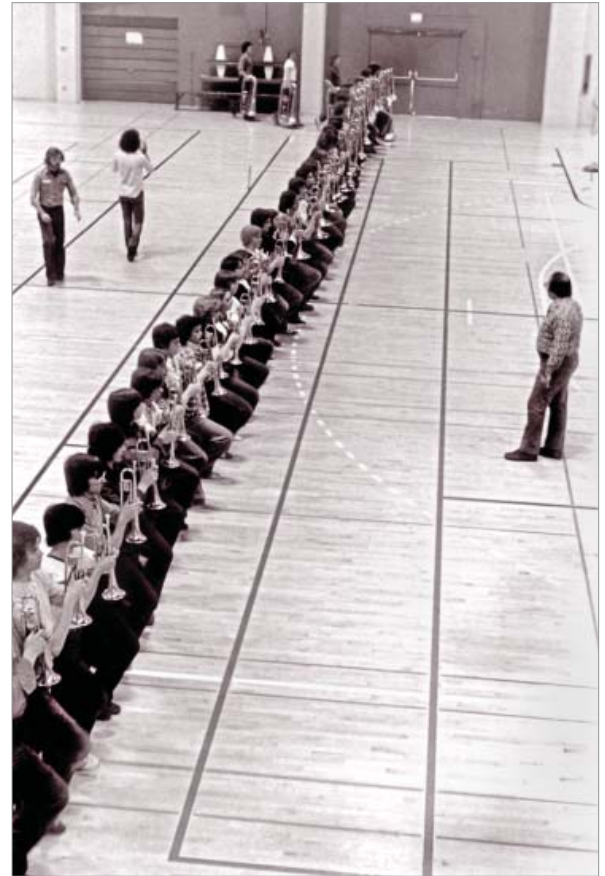
Mahler’s 7th Symphony Finale

Farandole

Indian Lady

Road Ode

To help put all this together, drills had been practised in the spacious gym at Seneca College, and a camp weekend was arranged. On April 24th and 25th a first weekend music camp was held at the Seneca College, King Campus in Aurora, Ontario. The regular May weekend camp of music and drill, would be held at Flesherton, Ontario, a former Optimist location.



Seneca Optimists first rehearsal (1976)

In a light-hearted fashion, Bob Duggan, Director of the Oakland Crusaders, presented Al Tierney with a certificate good for five points at any contest in June 1976. Tierney wondered if it was worth anything without the signature of Vince Macciocchi, Chief Judge.

The Krescendos Corps from Peterborough, now had a larger Corps and were having their music arranged by California arrangers. They, along with the Dutchmen of Kitchener and the Seneca Optimists, would all be wearing new uniforms this year.

Bugles now in use included: Contra Bass, French Horn, Soprano, Bass Baritone, Mellophone, Baritone and Flugelhorn. In 1958, there had just been Baritone, French Horn and Soprano.

A Corps in Aurora, the Ambassadors, under the direction of Paul and Bev Ranson, had on their instructional staff:

Horns: Ray Bassett, Steve Dunn

Drums: Dave Phillips, Mike Robinson



Aurora Ambassadors (1976)

These people were all members of the Seneca Optimists. There was no restriction on this kind of activity, as the Optimists had once seen fit to impose.

Information Drum Corps, a C.D.C.A. publication since 1972, under the direction of Al Tierney, advertised the Toronto Optimists 1975 yearbook. It was forty pages, a pictorial record of the year, that sold for \$3.00. For any that were in it, it was more than good value for the money. Green Capsule Comments had ceased to exist in its original format. There was no green Corps anymore, as there were no Optimists anymore. The famous publication, in a clever move, was reconstituted as “Gold Capsule Comments”, its new name alluding to the yellow uniforms now in use. Thus renamed, it continued, equally as good, equally informative.

Information Drum Corps, itself, was a newsletter for all members of C.D.C.A. Corps. It had a circulation of 4,500. Its editor was who else but Don Daber.

By this time, it was noted, by those in the know, that the anticipated problems regarding the Seneca Optimists had not developed. Conversely, some problems not expected arose. Many of these were teething pains that would be resolved as time wore on.

The Oakland Crusaders were, this year, the host of the 1976 Individuals Contest, held at Etobicoke Collegiate. It turned out to be one of the biggest and best in years, a real tribute to the Crusaders.

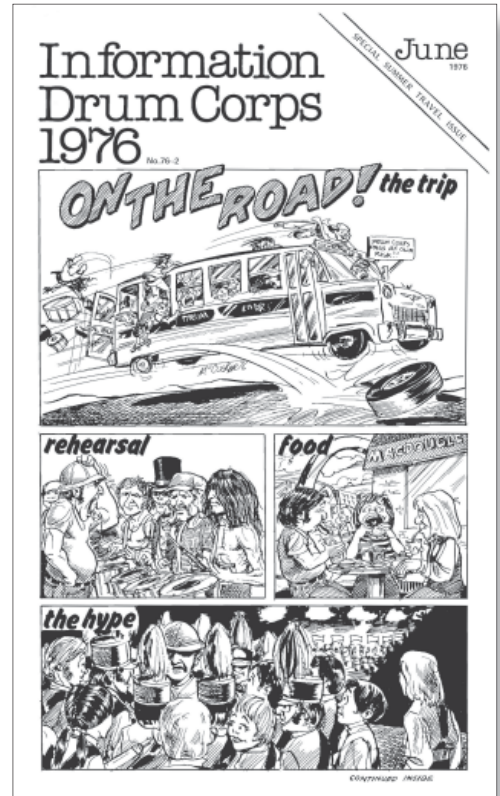
The Seneca Optimists did well in the percussion division, but did not fare well in the brass. Oakland had six wins in the brass division, Seneca none. Where they did do well was in the rifle and sabre division.

The Individual results were not totally an indication of what would happen on the field this year, though the guard captions were.

The Cadet/Lancers, growing in quality, had a tour booked in the United States this year, from July 1st to July 5th. They would be doing parades and contests in New York and Pennsylvania.

A man, whose name will appear later in this story, was John Jones. He started in Drum Corps with the Pickering Blue Notes, and then went to De La Salle. Staying with them, he, eventually, became the Personnel Director, Director, then Business Manager. Due to the merger of last year, he was now Business Manager for the Oakland Crusaders.

The tales of the two Corps that we have been discussing are the only ones that really apply now.



Cover of Information Drum Corps (1976)



Oakland Crusaders (1976)

This year, in the Canadian Junior scene, they were the only ones that would have any meaning, competition wise, as they strove to outdo each other. Other Corps were of good quality, providing entertaining shows, but these two were in their own league, score-wise, in Canada. As best we can, with the scanty information available, we shall follow their fortunes. The Oakland Crusaders had already cracked the charmed circle of the D.C.I. top twelve. The Seneca Optimists had that as one of their goals for this year. The latest up and comer, Offensive Lions, from Jonquiere, Quebec, would make their presence felt quite a bit later.



Seneca Optimists rehearsing (1976)

The Tour Begins

The first contest for which we have any records took place on July 10, but there were others before that. So, maybe, fortunately, our eyewitness memories can come into play. Two weeks after the Corps camp in Flesherton, the Seneca Optimists entered their first contest of the year. It was on June 5th, at Borough of York Stadium, in Toronto. Also in it were the Oakland Crusaders. This was the first meeting, ever, of these two units. For Seneca, it was also their first public field show and competition.



Joel Alleyne, Oakland Crusaders' Drum Major (1976)

That the merger had worked well was proven by the fact that the Seneca Optimists defeated the Oakland Crusaders in their first ever competition. A difference between now and last year was that the newest Corps had started out on top. In 1975, the Oakland Corps had started out in second, picking up steam as the year progressed. Seneca Optimists were off to a good start. It continued. A second victory over the Crusaders was recorded one week later, at Seagram Stadium in Waterloo. Things were looking good until Ajax, one week later. Having a reputation, for any Optimist Corps, as “loser city”, this strange tradition was upheld. For the first time in three contests, Oakland Crusaders won at this location. As if to bear out whatever misgivings that our Corps had about Ajax, the very next day, in Peterborough, Ontario, the tables were turned, again. The Seneca Optimists scored a full five-point victory over their rivals. Strange business, this. So strange, in fact, that the future would see some reaction to this situation. Following in rapid succession were contests in Welland and Kitchener, Ontario, against the same Corps. Then Tonawanda, NY, Kingston, NY, Oswego, NY and Fort Wayne, Indiana. These shows were against other Corps, in neutral territory. Seneca Optimists were received well wherever they went, scoring high, never last, even winning one or two. Fort Wayne,

“From Toronto... The Optimists!” by Colin Hedworth. Chapter 26. (continued)

Indiana, was part of the final leg of a U.S. tour, after which they went to Michigan City, Indiana. It is for this affair that we now possess some information.

On July 10th, less than half way through the season, the Seneca Optimists found themselves up against some of the best, south of the border.

Their show found favour, as they pulled into third place.

1st	Phantom Regiment	78.15
2nd	27th Lancers	76.35
3rd	Seneca Optimists	71.85
4th	Cavaliers	70.80
5th	Blue Stars	66.70

These were all good Corps, and Seneca defeated two of them, the Cavaliers and Blue Stars. This was a real first for the new unit. Probably, the first time for all the members of the founding Corps. It was an indication of how well the merger had worked.



Seneca Optimists rehearsing (1976)

Back in Canada, it was to Birchmount Stadium, in Scarborough, and Kitchener, on July 17th and 18th. A football game in Hamilton, Ontario, then provided a brief respite from the pressures of competition.



Seneca Optimists (Michigan City, 1976)

On July 31st, the Seneca Optimists, the “Mellow Yellow” as they were now being tagged, took off for Ogdensburg, N.Y. Their main Canadian rival, Oakland Crusaders, was on a U.S. tour. During this, they placed fourth, on July 31st, eight points behind the winning Phantom Regiment. Three weeks earlier, Seneca Optimists had lost to them by only 6.30, so the season still looked very promising.



Seneca Optimists (Michigan City, 1976)

Next, in Ottawa, Ontario was the Canadian Capital Open Contest.

Seneca competed against a field of Canadian and American juniors, minus the Oakland Crusaders. At this point, it would have been good to be competing against them. Seneca swept the field with one of their classiest displays yet, almost eleven points over the second place Offensive Lions of Jonquiere, Quebec. This result showed it was a one Corps contest. It also showed that the rest of the Canadian season was likely to be a two Corps affair.

Only two days later, the Oakland Corps, still on their U.S. tour, was only four and a half behind Phantom Regiment. There was much action to go on yet, but it was evident how things were shaping up regarding the Canadian scene.

August 10th, Pontiac, Michigan, D.C.I. North. In a field of all D.C.I. Corps, Seneca pulled off a fifth place, scoring 80.5. This put them behind the Cavaliers, whom they had previously, defeated, by over two points. The California Corps, Blue Devils, who were far ahead of everyone this year, won it. Seneca did manage to defeat the 27th Lancers, another first.

Ominously, on the same date, the Oakland Crusaders placed only 0.45 behind Phantom Regiment, of Rockford, Illinois. With a score of 83.65, they were seen to be rapidly improving, just as they had last year. Their U.S. scores were now surpassing those of the Seneca Optimists.

In Canada, the Offensive Lions were definitely a good Junior “A” Corps, destined for future honours; however, it was doubtful whether they could make any inroads this year. The Seneca – Oakland rivalry was the one sparking the most interest. As yet, its outcome was undetermined.



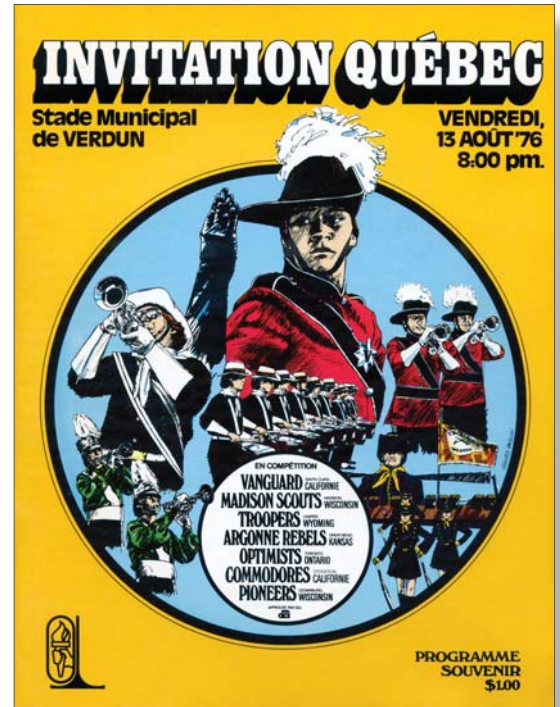
Oakland Crusaders (1976)

Rochester, N.Y., was the next arena for our Corps. It was still somewhat of a Corps town, but not the hotbed of activity that it had once been. It would be once again. Lots of D.C.A. shows would be held here. D.C.A. was the senior version of D.C.I., though no doubt with some differences.

One day after Rochester, the Seneca Optimists appeared in Verdun, a suburb of Montreal, Quebec. A top-notch contest, featuring mostly American Drum Corps it was won by the Santa Clara Vanguard. In second were the Madison Scouts, with 86.35. They were the 1975 D.C.I. champions but were having trouble this year. Blue Devils were conquering all.

Third place at this tough venue was our Corps, the Seneca Optimists, scoring 81.90. This, placing them above the resurgent Casper Troopers, was a good showing against more experienced, longer established Corps from south of the border. Their score also compared favourably with that of the Oakland Crusaders, in the United States. There was still room for optimism.

The Canadian Nationals were less than four weeks away, but there were still some very big contests before that. Very big! For the Seneca Optimists, two of them were the World Open in Lynn, Massachusetts, and the C.Y.O. Nationals in Boston. Both were top rated shows, but neither were indicative of Drum Corps supremacy in the United States. That distinction now belonged to the D.C.I. Nationals. Before the advent of D.C.I., it had been both the V.F.W. and American Legion Nationals.



Seneca Optimists (Michigan City, 1976)

Union City, New Jersey, the last home of Blessed Sacrament, was the scene of the final contest before D.C.I. Nationals, for the Seneca Optimists. As the new unit, this would be their first attempt to crack the charmed circle of the big twelve. Everybody wanted to accomplish this feat so not much was allowed to interfere with the smooth running of things. D.C.I. shows are run along very professional lines, and any misdemeanours or lapses can be costly in terms of points, even before you get on the field. These situations are where a good Corps Director proves his worth, and Al Tierney was one of the best. The date for this grand spectacle was August 18th-21st. The location, again, was Veterans Stadium, in Philadelphia.

D.C.I. Nationals

Adding spice to this for the Seneca Corps, trying to break in for the first time, was the presence of the Oakland Crusaders. They had made the top twelve the year before, placing as high as sixth. Both Corps had done well in the United States this year, and the outcome was bound to be less than predictable.

The preliminaries showed how things were shaping up. It was won by the Blue Devils, with a score of 91.25, but there was no surprise at that outcome. Still trying to preserve their 1975 status, only two points behind were the rising Madison Scouts. Four Corps back, in sixth place, with a score of 86.15 were the Oakland Crusaders.



Oakland Crusaders (DCI, 1976)

With numerous corps in the prelims one's score and placing were not known until sometime later, after tabulation was complete. As a result, one did not know who had made the finals until all were finished. Seneca Optimists, after doing one of their best shows of the year, returned to their billet to await the results. These would determine their immediate future.

They were billeted in Valley Forge again, this time in a Military College barracks. There, they relaxed, practised, took it easy, but really everyone was awaiting the outcome of the preliminaries.

A phone call signalled the moment. A great shout of joy went up. They had captured eleventh place, making the finals. The score, 83.50. They were over the Troopers, and only 0.75 out of eighth. Their Canadian rivals, the Oakland Crusaders, were up by 2.65 over the Seneca Optimists.



Seneca Optimists (DCI, 1976)

Now, though, come what may, it was on to the night finals. This was to produce some change in standings. Seneca Optimists slipped back to twelfth place, thereby remaining behind the Oakland Corps who, playing well, retained their middle of the pack standing, with a substantial lead over the Seneca Corps. Still, they were more happy than sad. This outing was a definite plus. In their first year, they had secured a firm footing in the ranks of D.C.I.

Now it was back to Canada. There were still the Canadian Nationals to contend with. This was at Seagram Stadium, Waterloo. By the time it came around, the mood of elation from Philadelphia had evaporated. It was replaced by a lethargic resignation. They had lost to Oakland at Philadelphia, so could not possibly win at the Canadian Nationals. This was the mood that took hold. It was an unhealthy indication of U.S. influence on Canadian Drum Corps.

As far as this Corps was concerned, they had lost all their incentive and ambition. Nobody wanted to do anything, thinking that now all was preordained. It is not necessarily so, but this mood was to reappear at other times. As with the Optimist Corps of 1961, it took one of the executive to kick the stuffing out and get thing moving again. Mr. Evert Botterweg injected the necessary spirit. He was, always had been, effective in more ways than one.



Paul McCusker's poster for the 1976 Canadian Nationals

The Corps picked itself up, dragging itself out of the slough of despair into which it had slid. Practices got underway that would lead to a good contest at the Nationals.

In the Junior “C” Division, the Lancers took first place, scoring 78.80. They were now the Junior “C” Champions for 1976.

The Junior “A” preliminaries showed what could be done, and would not have happened, had the Seneca Optimists continued in their funky condition.

1st	Oakland Crusaders	81.85
2nd	Seneca Optimists	80.80
3rd	Dutchmen	61.60
4th	Peterborough Krescendos	49.70

So, the Corps had managed to pull themselves to within 1.05 of first place. If not a victory, it was an improvement, and, more importantly, a sign that success in Canada does not always hinge on events in the U.S.A.



Seneca Optimists (DCI Finals, Philadelphia, 1976)

The Finals

Here, a big spread on drums gave the Oakland Crusaders their second National title. Even though Seneca had improved to 83.65 in the night show Crusaders had done better. Seneca finished in second place, 2.45 behind Crusaders’ 86.1.

A large spread on drums was responsible for much of this. 1.6 behind the Crusaders to be exact. In earlier years, drums had been a strong point of the Optimist Corps. Now the shoe was on the other foot. In fact, the Oakland Crusaders’ drum line was to become famous.

Seneca Optimists best caption was marching and maneuvering, taking first in both execution and general effect. These usually go hand in hand. Summaries of the year, by neutral observers, were very revealing.

Seneca Optimists “had one of the finest shows of 1976 with dazzling yellow uniforms and a wonderful Czapinski drill. Pleasing, if not great, music. Show with a few rough edges, but which did bring them firmly into the big time.” and “A magnificent Corps.” Rough edges can be ironed out.



Oakland Crusaders drums (DCI Finals, 1976)

The Oakland Corps commented on by the same observer, were said to have musically, a much better show than Seneca does. Their “Swan Lake” was, to all, a spine-tingling production. At the 1976 Nationals, overall, the Crusaders had looked sharper than the rest. They had deserved their first place score of 86.10

So that was how things stood, in Canada, at the end of the 1976 competition scene. For the Seneca Optimists, there was next year to look forward to, changes to be made, a good first year to build on. They had beaten some of the best around.



Seneca Optimists (1976)

More events were still to take place this year, for others, as well as our Corps. Following what seemed to be a trend, the Flying Dutchmen of Kitchener and the Dutch Boy Cadets merged to form a new Junior “A” Corps, “Northstar”. Their director would be none other than Bob Christie who had, briefly, been Director of the Toronto Optimists. He had lately been with the St. Johns Girls of Brantford.

In Early September, the Seneca Optimists had appeared at the CNE, for an evening of pageantry that had included bands as well as Drum Corps. Also in this display were the Oakland Crusaders. Both were well received, but the music of the Crusaders was more pleasing than that of the Seneca Corps. This bore out earlier observations and would lead to changes.



Seneca Optimists (Michigan City, 1976)

On September 25th, the Corps helped launch a new parade Corps in Owen Sound. This was the Georgian Lancers, and Seneca played their show at a local school in order to publicize the Drum Corps. There was not much activity in this region.

Progressing, the D.C.I. Rules Committee made a decision to allow the use of two-valve bugles. Piston valves, rather than one piston, one rotary. Rotary valves never were perfected, always breaking down. This decision helped overcome the fact that the use of slip slides was illegal. The Drum Corps bugle was still unique, in that there were certain notes it still could not play. Were three valves far off?



Seneca Optimists (Michigan City, 1976)

A final announcement was that the D.C.I. Nationals were to be held in Denver, Colorado, in 1977, at Mile High Stadium, the home of the Denver Broncos football team. Preliminaries would be in the foothills town of Boulder, Colorado. This would be the first time D.C.I. Nationals had been held west of the Mississippi.

The Canadian Nationals would be at Birchmount Stadium, in Scarborough, Ontario, scene of many a confrontation.



Seneca Optimists rehearsing (1976)

So, for the Seneca Optimists Drum and Bugle Corps, it was back to the drawing board, buckle down to work. There was a large crowd left, ready to go at it again.



Seneca Optimists (Michigan City, 1976)



Seneca Optimists (DCI Prelims, Philadelphia, 1976)



Mhairi Cummings (World Open, 1976)



Laura King (1976)



Seneca Optimists (Michigan City, 1976)



Seneca Optimists (DCI Prelims, Philadelphia, 1976)

A few Scores for the Seneca Optimists and some of our competitors as the summer of 1976 progressed

Contest ► Corps Name ▼	Ottawa (June 16)	Michigan City (July 10)	World Open (Aug 15)	CYO Finals (Aug 16)	DCI Finals (Aug 21)	Canadian Nationals (Sept 4)
Seneca Optimists	71.30	71.85	80.30	81.20	78.80	83.65
Oakland Crusaders	67.45				82.10	86.10
27th Lancers		76.35	81.25	85.00	85.00	
Blue Devils			88.75	90.65	92.70	
Bridgemen			79.80	82.65	84.90	
Cavaliers		70.80	81.75		84.30	
Madison Scouts					90.70	
Santa Clara					89.50	

For a list of scores for this or other years, go to our website:
<https://www.TorontoOptimistsHistory.ca/>

The Kiwanis Cavaliers Drum Corps

THE KIWANIS KAVALIERS Drum and Bugle Corps was established in the fall of 1971 and was active from 1972 through 2005.

The corps was founded in the fall of 1971 by Jack Turner (who, at one point, considered calling it “The Apple Corps” but didn’t due to sponsorship by the local Kiwanis Club and better judgment on his part), and was a member of Drum Corps International.

The corps was Canada’s only Division I drum corps until it moved to Miami after the 2006 season. The Kiwanis Cavaliers had appeared in both Division I and Division II (now “Open Class”) competition throughout its history; however, in 1996 they focused on Division 1/World Class. The corps merged with the Tampa Bay Thunder Drum and Bugle Corps in 2002, becoming a full member corps for the first time in two decades. The corps also toured Europe in 2001, representing Drum Corps International in Germany, Belgium, and The Netherlands.

In 1987, the St. Andrew’s drum and bugle corps of Cambridge, Ontario merged with the Kiwanis Cavaliers.

The Tampa Bay Thunder merged with the corps in 2002. The corps, then, began to maintain administrative offices in Tampa Bay, Florida as well as Kitchener, Ontario.

SPOTLIGHT



Kiwanis Cavaliers (1977)

Spotlight: on the Kiwanis Cavaliers Drum Corps (continued)

The corps withdrew from DCI competition for 2006.

In 2006 the corps moved from its previous locations of Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario to Miami, Florida, and announced its affiliation with Paradox Percussion Theatre and its intention to field a corps in DCI competition in 2007. In January 2007 the corps decided that it would be inactive for the 2007 competitive season.

Throughout the years, the corps had over 2,000 local youths participate in its programs, which have been written and directed by many local and international artists and music educators.



Kiwanis Cavaliers (Welland, 1978)



Some members of Kiwanis Cavaliers (1998)

Spotlight: on the Kiwanis Cavaliers Drum Corps (continued)



Kiwanis Cavaliers (1977)

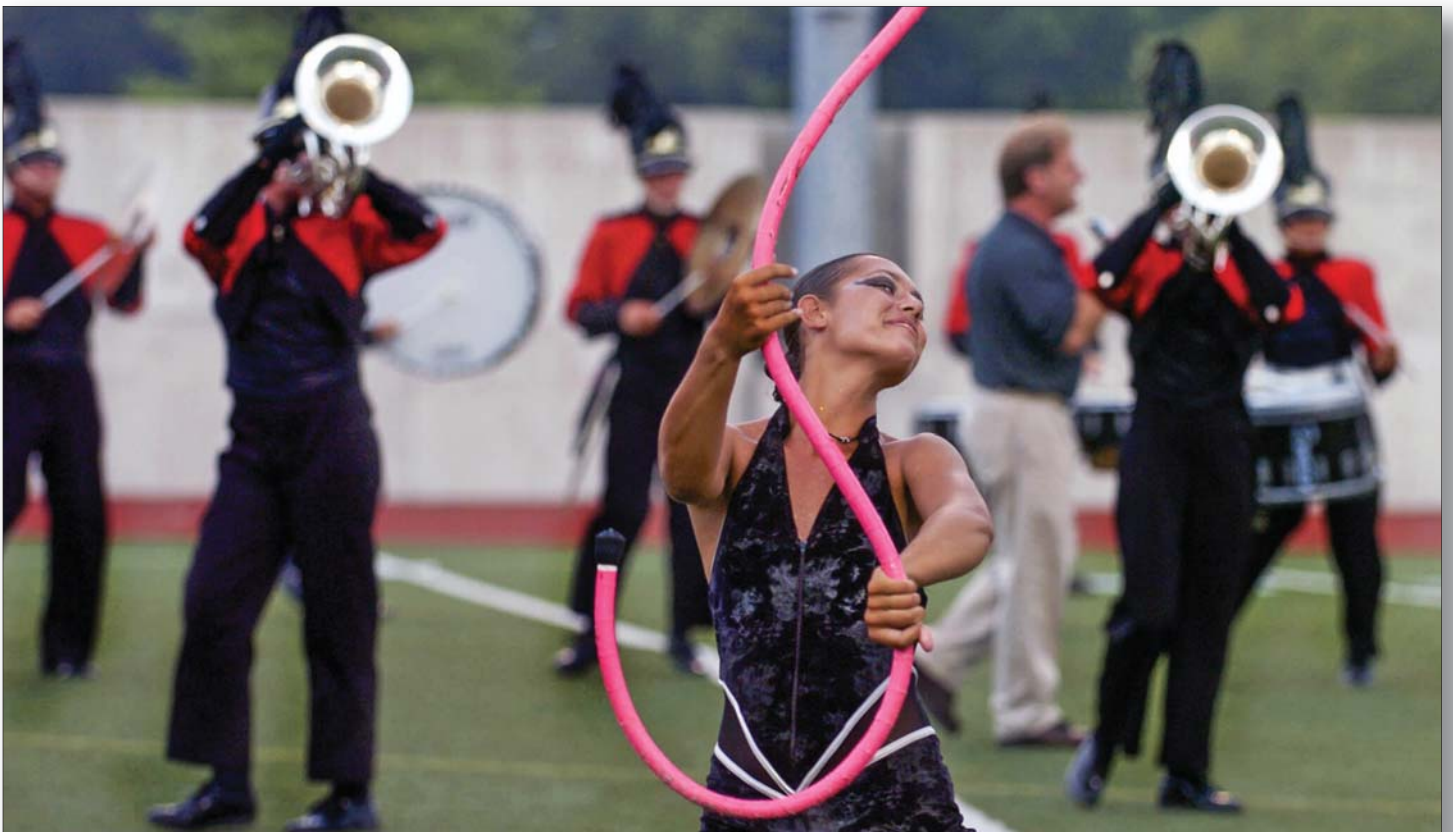


Doug Darwin (Corps Director) and Jim Law (1998)

Spotlight: on the Kiwanis Cavaliers Drum Corps (continued)



Kiwanis Cavaliers (2005)



Kiwanis Cavaliers (2005)

The Toronto Optimists and the Voyage of the S.S. Badger

by Douglas MacKenzie

The 410 foot S.S. BADGER can accommodate 600 passengers and 180 vehicles, including; R.V.s, motorcycles, motor coaches, and commercial trucks during her sailing season. Originally designed primarily to transport railroad cars, this grand ship and the people who serve her have successfully adapted to the changing world since she first entered service in 1953. The ship runs between Manitowoc, Wisconsin, across Lake Michigan to Ludington, Michigan.



The SS Badger

Our adventure began on July 3, 1975; we had travelled to the Midwest for a series of four contests in four nights. The third night of our mini-tour, we were billeted at the YMCA in Manitowoc, Wisconsin, with a contest the following day at Appleton, about a one-hour drive from Manitowoc.

The return drive time from Appleton, Wisconsin to Toronto, Ontario is about fourteen hours by bus. There was no way our bus drivers could do that stretch without stopping to rest, in compliance with the Ministry of Transportation. So a one-day drive would turn into two. What to do?

While we were staying at the YMCA, I happened to spy what looked like a very large ship not far off in the distance. Out of curiosity, I asked our business managers Bud Jemmett and Jack Watt, to investigate. They reported back saying that the ship was a car ferry that went to Ludington on the other side of Lake Michigan. The thought occurred to me that if we took the ferry to Ludington, that would leave about a seven-hour drive to Toronto, and we would be within the guidelines of the Ministry of Transport. It would also mean that the drivers could get some shuteye on the ship, and our mileage charges for the busses would be substantially lessened.



Toronto Optimists (1975)

The Toronto Optimists and the Voyage of the S.S. Badger (continued)

I sent Jack and Bud back to the ship to get the schedule and the costs associated with two busses, three vans, an equipment truck, one hundred and twenty teenagers and fifteen adults. They negotiated with the powers that be and came back with a sum that we could not afford. What to do?

It should be explained that the Toronto Optimists Drum Corps were not exactly flush financially at the time; most of our funding came from the Booster Club, the members themselves, along with sponsorship from the York Toronto Optimist Club. What to do?

We explained the situation to the corps members, many of whom had never been in a dingy, let alone a ship. It was agreed that they would pool their resources, and my credit card would handle any shortage. I had “optimistic” hopes of recouping those expenses, which I eventually did.



Toronto Optimists (1975)

After our performance at Appleton, we immediately left the contest site and headed for the S.S. Badger. We arrived around midnight. Our rolling stock was loaded, and while exploring the ship, we noticed a large group of motorcyclists coming on board. Actually, a motorcycle gang. These guys were not the Shriners motor patrol; believe me, they looked, well, intimidating along the lines of the pirates of the Caribbean. What to do?

The last thing I thought of was getting involved in any way with the motorcyclists. I had no permission to take the corps onto the high seas. I had thoughts of the Titanic and my liability if we should hit an Iceberg. Highly unlikely on Lake Michigan in July. But the thought was still there. Most of the kids were tired, and a few rented cabins supposedly to bed down for the night. Since the drum corps in my day, the sixties, was all-male and not co-ed, I didn't think about why there was such interest in cabin procurement. The penny finally dropped – too late, cabins rented. Those without cabins moved about the ship, some settling in loungers at the ship's stern, some exploring and, of course, the cabin crew.

My assistant director Bernie White and I were on the aft deck. We had commandeered two very comfortable loungers and were discussing the trip's pros and cons. It had only been about an hour into the voyage when the first mate found us and asked that we have our charges calm down. They were making plenty of noise traversing the ship, specifically the bow area, where several cabins were located below. Evidently, there had been complaints by the adult paying passengers in cabins about the noise emanating above decks. I'm sure the corps members who had rented cabins had other things on their minds. What to do?



The SS Badger

The Toronto Optimists and the Voyage of the S.S. Badger (continued)

As requested by the first mate, I suggested we go to the bow and ask that our charges remove themselves from the area. Now back in the day, a suggestion was more like a command. When we got to the bow, there was movement and voices that were quite audible; however, it was so dark that you could not see your hand in front of your face.

In my best authoritative voice, I shouted, “EVERYONE OFF THE BOW, GET BACK TO THE STERN.” With that done and my intrepid assistant director following, we discussed how we had remedied that problem with bravado. Several bodies of various sizes and shapes ran past us, muttering profanities and threats only to escape into the darkness of the night. It was like a stampede, people running and pushing to get past Bernie and me. Mission accomplished! Bernie and I got back to our loungers and settled into trying to get some sleep before we arrived at our destination Ludington, Michigan. As I lay there dozing, I heard one individual with a voice akin to Brutus of Popeye the sailor fame says to no one in particular, “when I get ahold of that Captain, I’m going to rip his #*&%ing head off and kick it overboard. I turned my head to see who was speaking and saw a guy who resembled Dick Butkus with a beard, a black T-shirt with skull and crossbones emblazoned on the chest and tattoos on arms the size of my thighs. What to do?

For the next half hour, Bernie and I talked loudly in disgust and indignation that we were paying passengers and could not figure out what we could have possibly done to be removed from the ship’s bow. The nerve of the Captain shouting at us like that, paying customers and all. I spent the rest of the voyage with one eye open and in complete silence.

Once docked, the vans, equipment truck and busses were moved off the ship, and the corps proceeded to board next to the gangway. Brutus and the gang roared off on their hogs in a cloud of exhaust fumes and smoke. A headcount was taken, and surprise, surprise, we were missing a few members. While the busses waited, we returned to the ship and found some that had taken births

needed to be roused by banging on the cabin doors with vigour. The stragglers were met with bemused smiles from the crew, who were now swabbing the decks. I invited them all to the weddings. As we marched down the gangway, the bus windows opened to rousing cheers for the red-faced stragglers. We departed Ludington without further incident, safe on terra firma bound for Toronto.

The Toronto Optimists of 1975 were indeed one of the great delights of my drum corps experience. I think fondly now of all the individuals involved and the trials and tribulations we all went through during that rags to riches year. Nothing came easy, and the challenge was always. “What to do?”



Toronto Optimists (1975)



Toronto Optimists (1975)

Toronto Optimists History - Newsletter: Staff and contributors

Editor: Bob Carell. **Assistant editor, design and production:** David Johns.

Photo Credits: Bob Carell, David Johns, Don Daber, Doug Smith, Eric McConachie, Peter McCusker

Contributions From: Dave Hopkins, Doug MacKenzie

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If not, please let us know:

toronto_optimist@rogers.com

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Toronto_Optimist@rogers.com in one of the
following formats:

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Or mail: Bob Carell:

1407 - 3050 Dufferin St, Toronto, ON M6B 4G3

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