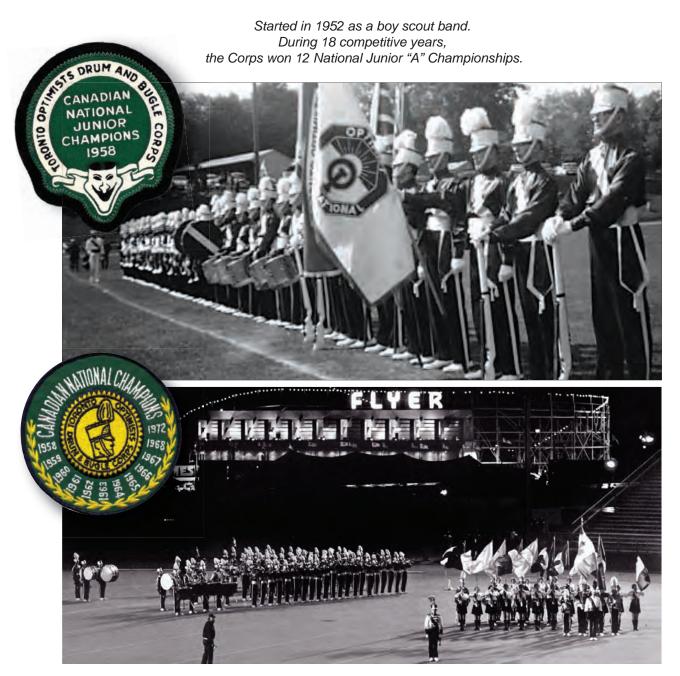
The TORONTO OPTIMISTS



A photo history of the Toronto Optimist Drum & Bugle Corps



A Keepsake Edition



Scout Band, Oakwood Collegiate, Toronto, 1952



Danforth Crusaders, with Barry Bell as Drum Major, CNE, Toronto, 1957



Western Tech, 1957

Keeping The Memories Alive!





David Johns (2022)

Bob Carell (2019)

From the Home Page for the website

Bob Carell and David Johns, the authors of this booklet, both marched with the Optimists in the 1960s. For the last 20 years, these two have worked to keep the memories of the Optimists alive.

David was a member of The Toronto Region Boy Scout Trumpet Band, and, later, the Don Mills Lions Sky Raiders. He joined The Toronto Optimists in the winter of 1959 and aged out in 1963. He stayed through 1964, helping Don Daber with photography, publicity and creating cartoons for Green Capsule Comments.

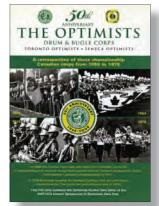
Bob marched in the Toronto Optimists from late 1962 through 1967. During the summers of 1976 and 1977, he served as a volunteer in the equipment department of the Seneca Optimists and, in the early 2000s, he joined the Optimists Alumni. It was during this time that Bob became interested in the corps' history. He realized that people's memories of the corps were fading and felt that the website could be used to rekindle those memories, both in corps members and in drum corps fans.

Ray Roussel had created the original alumni website; however, its primary purpose was to disseminate music in Acrobat format to corps members. Gord Lefevre and his son took over from Ray. They added additional pages and introduced a small Photo Gallery. In 2005, Bob started helping Gord with the website. At that time, it contained a few web pages and fewer than 200 photos. When Gord and his son resigned in 2006, Bob volunteered as webmaster and continued searching for, and posting, historical material relating to The Optimists.

Over the years, Bob spent thousands of hours scanning, restoring and posting photos, slides and negatives taken by Don Daber, Doug Smith, Eric McConachie and others. He shared his work with the greater drum corps community by posting it on the alumni website and, later, on various Facebook pages.

In 2006, David joined the Alumni Corps as a marching member. He designed the logo and crest used by the Alumni, incorporating the original corpsman profile which was created by Barry Bell.

Bob encouraged David and Eric McConachie to take photos of the Alumni. He edited their work, then posted it on the website. In addition, he gathered both audio recordings and video footage showing the original scout band, the Toronto Optimists, the Seneca Optimists, and others. He digitized and edited this material,



Front cover of the 2008 Reunion DVD

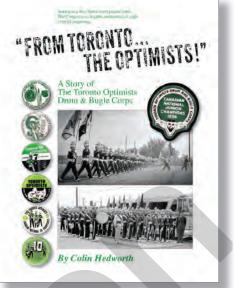
sometimes creating slideshows, and shared it on the website and on YouTube. During his tenure, the website grew to include over 300 web pages, while the Photo Gallery expanded to about 13,000 images.

The 50th anniversary of the Toronto Optimists was in 2008 and Bob created a reunion DVD. The DVD

was over two hours and included slideshows of the Toronto Optimists and Seneca Optimists, a "We Remember" slideshow together with video footage of the 1967 Toronto Optimists, the 1976 and 1977 Seneca Optimists and the 2007 and 2008 Optimists Alumni. David used his skills to design promotional and keepsake graphics, including the packaging wrap and mini-poster insert for the anniversary DVD.

In late 2009, David and Bob resurrected Green Capsule Comments, The Optimists' newsletter. The following year, David stopped marching to focus on photographing the corps and working on the Corps newsletter.

During the 1990s, Colin Hedworth had produced a hand-written history of the Optimists that included a few photo-copied images of the corps. In 2014, Bob spent months creating a digital version that included hundreds of photos. He published this as a book and posted it online as an Acrobat file. David designed the front and back covers for the book.



Front cover of Colin's history

David retired from the Alumni in 2019 and Bob left in early 2020.

In 2020, after COVID hit, instead of baking bread, Bob started TorontoOptimistsHistory.ca, a new website which has its focus on the competitive years. This site was something that many people had requested; however, Bob never had enough time to create it.

In January 2021, David and Bob started the Toronto Optimists History Newsletter for the History website. They posted it quarterly and used it as a vehicle to republish Colin's history of the corps. Each issue included two chapters of Colin's history, with many new photos. Recollections from former corps members are an integral part of the newsletters. These are timeless gems and we wish that there were more. Most issues also included a "Feature" on a major Canadian drum corps plus a "Spotlight" on a lesser-known corps.

While Bob and David are taking a hiatus from publishing the newsletter, Bob continues updating the History website and regularly posts new photos of the Optimists and other corps that were taken during the competitive years. Since the site went live, he has posted over 1,000 new photos! And there are many more to come!!



Front cover of a newsletter

A Brief History of The Toronto Optimists

HE TORONTO OPTIMISTS Drum and Bugle Corps traces its roots to the 18th Toronto Boy

Scout Troop, founded by Mr. Bud Parker in 1952. The 18th Scout Troop eventually became the 157th Scout Troop but no one seems to remember how, or why, that happened. By 1955, the boys were too old for Scouts, so they left Scouting to form the Davenport Trumpet Band with Mr. Parker as Director and Mr. Al Baggs as Business Manager. After an initial refusal, Mr. Baggs convinced the Downtown Toronto Optimist Club to sponsor this fledgling group. The new group was officially called The Optimist Trumpet Band, but it was affectionately known as Opti-Corps.



1953 Scout Band: L-R: back row: Ed Nanni, Jim Patten, Marv Parker, Ben Woodley, 2nd row: ?, Peter Coward, Paul Stephens; front row: Larry Cheevers, ?, Al Latham

In 1956, Opti-Corps competed in the Novice Class Championship where they took first place. For 1957,

the band not only moved up a level, but actually won the Junior "B" Championship. After the 1957 season, the corps changed their name to the Toronto Optimists Drum & Bugle Corps and moved to Junior "A", the top competitive category. Most members of the new corps came from Opti-Corps, the Danforth Tech Crusaders and the Western Tech Trumpet Band. When word got out that a new corps was starting, they were joined by a few people from Leaside Lions, Don Mills Sky Raiders, St. Mary's, and other established units.



Opti-Corps (Bay St, Toronto, 1957)

Optimists' first instructors were Barry Bell and Lorne Ferrazzutti. They had been members of the Western

Tech Trumpet Band and, later, instructors of the Danforth Tech Drum and Bugle Corps. At the end of 1957, Danforth Tech dropped support of the corps, forcing Barry and Lorne to look elsewhere. Mr. Baggs, by now Optimists' Corps Commander, recruited these fine gentlemen for his new corps. The Optimists won not only their first Nationals in 1958, but every Nationals from 1958 through 1968! By late 1959, drum corps nuts were referring to the corps as "The Green Machine".



Barry and Lorne (Western Tech, 1954)

A Brief History of the Toronto Optimists (continued)

Life was not always easy for the corps. On the level of personnel, about every two years we'd lose many

of our members. We lost so many members at the end of 1963 that we almost did not field a corps in 1964. Thankfully, we had a feeder corps. In the spring, management decided that we would compete, getting our much-needed members from our feeder corps. To do that, we had to disband the feeder corps. That decision had long-term consequences but, at that moment, those kids saved our butts! Very few people, including corps members, knew that we had been in such dire straits.



De La Salle (Buffalo, 1961)

For many years, De La Salle was our chief Canadian competitor. In 1961, they had a very good corps and become the first Canadian corps since 1958 to beat us. We won Nationals, but the margin was only 0.05 points! By 1966, another corps, the Cadets LaSalle from Ottawa, had moved into second place and were hoping to take over first. LaSalle managed to beat us in prelims at the Nationals in both 1966 and 1967;

however, both years we held them off in finals.

Winning consecutive Nationals created a "psychological" burden on our members. None of us wanted to be the corps that ended the winning streak. Each year that we won, that burden became heavier. That winning streak also affected the audience who began booing us, hoping another corps would win. The 1967 Nationals were in Ottawa, LaSalle's home and the boos were so loud that we could not even hear



LaSalle Cadets (Varsity Stadium, Toronto, 1966)

commands from our drum major. By the end of our performance, the cheers were louder than the boos.

Many members of The Optimists aged out at the end of 1967. We always lost members through attrition and age-outs; however, without a feeder corps, 1968 would be a challenging year. The last time that Optimists had started a season losing to another Canadian corps was ten years earlier, in 1958, when Scout House was at its peak. In 1968, De La Salle started on top with Optimists in second and LaSalle in third. This situation lasted until the Optimists won a September contest at the Canadian National Exhibition. Optimists also won Nationals for their 11th consecutive title.

At the end of the 1968 season, the Downtown Toronto Optimist Club, our sponsor since 1955, announced that they would drop their sponsorship of the corps at the end of 1969. There would be money to compete in 1969, but nothing for extras, like new equipment.

HE 1969 SEASON started like 1968, with De La Salle on top. The Optimists did their absolute best, working as hard as they could, hoping to repeat the events of 1968. After trailing Del all year, we beat Del by a solid 2.3 points. And this was only five days before Nationals! This year, though, there was a different outcome at Nationals. De La Salle took first place,

beating the Optimists by 0.05 points, the same spread by which the Optimists beat Del in 1961! De La Salle was now top-dog and the Optimists would have to play catch-up.



Losing their sponsor can

Toronto Optimists (CNE, 1969)

mean the end of a drum corps. Those who had marched in the Optimists loved the corps and would do everything possible to keep the corps alive. A group of former Optimists banded together to create the York-Toronto Optimist Club and the new club assumed sponsorship of the corps. As for the corps, they continued to work hard.

Both 1970 and 1971 were years of rebuilding. By 1972, the outlook was very promising. The corps had an excellent musical repertoire and a great deal of potential. The 1972 season started off, much like 1968 and

1969, with De La Salle beating everyone. Once again, the tide turned in September. The day before Nationals, Optimists beat Del, in both prelims and finals, at the Big "10" contest in Hamilton, Ontario. The next day, the Optimists won the tightest contest in the history of the Canadian Nationals. The final scores showed Toronto Optimists with 81.40, De La Salle with 81.30 and Cadets LaSalle in third place with 81.25! It was one heck of a contest!!



Toronto Optimists (Nationals, CNE Stadium, 1972)

In 1973, the Optimists experienced the most serious challenge in their history. The corps had a "no drugs" policy and, at their May camp, members were told that management would resign if anyone broke this rule. Unfortunately, a few corps members broke the rule. Both the Corps Director and the Music Director resigned. Management expelled some members while a few others had to stand on the sidelines when the

A Brief History of the Toronto Optimists (continued)

corps performed. This was less than a month before Nationals. It looked like the Corps might fold. Instead, they pulled together and finished the year. Scores at Nationals were even tighter than they had been in 1972. De La Salle should have been the outright winner, but they received penalties totalling 2.6 points. Cadets LaSalle lost 0.3 points in penalties. There was a tie for first with both De La Salle and Cadets LaSalle scoring 79.6 with the Optimists in second place at 79.0!

By 1975, DCI (Drum Corps International) had become the dominant force in drum corps. One requirement of competing at the top levels of DCI involved having a very large corps with substantial financing. On the field, the Toronto Optimists, under Corps Director Doug MacKenzie, did well in 1975. They beat some good, well-established corps and moved from a 34th place finish in 1974 to 16th place in the 1975 DCI prelims. Unfortunately, the Optimists had neither the finances nor sufficient members for a DCI calibre corps and the likelihood of that changing seemed very slim.



After eighteen years of competition, the Toronto Optimists disbanded at the end of 1975. While the corps was gone, the

memories will always remain. In addition to twelve National Championships, eleven of those consecutive, we met forever friends with whom we worked to create The Toronto Optimists. We have our memories, not always good, of rehearsing and performing in the rain, often under a scorching sun and, sometimes,

in snow. We remember sleeping on the buses on our way to parades and competitions. Sometimes we won

and sometimes we lost. After so many years, none of that matters. The treasure is in the friendships and the memories!

Optimists motto roughly translates to "Believe you have it, and you have it". We believed in ourselves and in what we could create together – establishing one of the finest drum corps in Canada.

In January 1976, the Toronto Optimists merged with the Seneca Princemen to form



Believe you have it, and you have it

a new corps, the Seneca Optimists. This new corps finished tenth in their first year at DCI finals.

Doug MacKenzie, Toronto Optimists' last Corps Director, addresses the corps during the Optimists' 1975 Corps Banquet

Through the Years: A Photo Retrospective

David Johns and I wondered how to wrap up the publication of Colin's Book: "From Toronto... The Optimists!". Instead of more words, we decided on a photo retrospective that encompasses the time before the Toronto Optimists, the Toronto Optimists and the Seneca Optimists, formed after the Toronto Optimists disbanded. Besides the photos, we include a few bios of people who played pivotal roles in the development and success of the organization.

Important Individuals



Scout Master "Bud" Parker



Mr. Al Baggs

"Bud" Parker was the man who originally conceived the idea of forming a band for his Scout Troop. The boys of the 18th Toronto Boy Scout Troop enthusiastically received the idea. Mr. A. W. Baggs, the Oakwood District Commissioner, granted the necessary approval for the project.

Once a week, the Scouts gathered in the halls of Davenport Presbyterian Church. Although the Scout District Office and Church approved of the band, they did not supply the instruments. Mr. Parker used his own money to pay for them and they remained his property. The band's first instruments were straight plastic bugles with no valves, herald horns and drumsticks but no drums, just pieces of wood. Equipping a band is an expensive proposition. For complete beginners, though, these instruments were, no doubt, adequate.

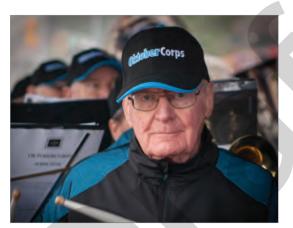
Al Baggs was singularly responsible for the existence of the band that ultimately became the Toronto Optimists Drum and Bugle Corps.

He became acquainted with the Band through his work with the Boy Scouts as the District Commissioner in charge of Badges. When Bud Parker, the founder of the Band, was unable to entice the Downtown Optimist Club of Toronto into sponsoring the Band, it was "Mr." Baggs that stepped in and had them reconsider their decision. When Bud Parker moved out of the city, it was "Mr." Baggs who took leadership of the Band and guided it through two championship seasons as Opti-Corps when they won the Canadian Novice and then the Junior "B" Championships.

It was he who had the vision, the organizational skills, and the determination that created the Toronto Optimists Drum and Bugle Corps, arguably Canada's greatest Drum Corps and probably one of its greatest marching music ensembles.



Barry Bell



Lorne Ferrazzutti



Don Daber

Barry Bell was the first Music Director and Brass Instructor of the Toronto Optimists.

Barry began his drum corps career with the Western Tech Trumpet Band. In 1955, the Danforth Tech Crusaders acquired his services. While there, Barry wore almost every hat imaginable: corps director, music director, brass instructor, drum instructor, drill instructor, drum major, etc.

At the end of the 1957 season, Barry moved to the newly formed Toronto Optimists as their Music Director and Brass Instructor. Under his guidance, the Optimists won eleven consecutive Canadian National Championships! Barry left the Optimists at the end of the 1969 season.

Lorne Ferrazzutti was the Toronto Optimists' first drum instructor.

Barry realized that he could use some help at Danforth. At the beginning of 1956, he invited his friend, Lorne, to join him at Danforth. Lorne instructed drums for the Crusaders during both the 1956 and 1957 seasons. At the end of 1957 Lorne, too, left to become the drum instructor for the newly formed Toronto Optimists.

Under Lorne's guidance, the Optimists' drumline became the best in Canada.

Don Daber discovered Drum Corps and The Optimists in 1960. Over the years, he served as corps' Photographer, Publicity Director and Corps Director.

In 1963 Don succeeded Mr Baggs as Corps Director of the Toronto Optimists. He eventually became Optimists' longest serving Corps Director. Don also created Green Capsule Comments, the newsletter for the Optimists.

Besides doing publicity for the Canadian and Ontario Drum Corps Associations, Don was also on the Board of Directors for these organizations. He supplied photos and articles to various drum corps publications and designed promotional material, programmes, and posters. Don also created the artwork used on the covers of many drum corps albums. Needless to say, he had a tremendous impact on both the Optimists and the greater Drum Corps activity.



Bud and Alice Parker with Gladys and Al Baggs (1954?)



Don Daber, Mr Baggs and Bud Parker (Reunion, 1969)



Lorne Ferrazzutti, Barry Bell and Mr Baggs (Rally Night, 1961)

The Scout Band



Scout Band (Waterloo Music Festival, 1953 or 1954)



Some members of the Scout Band. L-R: Bob Bond, Peter Coward, Ed Nanni, Jim Patten, Al Latham, Harry Clark, Ben Woodley (1953)



Scout Band (Waterloo Music Festival, 1954)



Scout Band (Dufferin Street, north of St Clair, 1954)

The Optimist Trumpet Band (aka Opti-Corps)



L-R: John Bodkin, Bob Brown, Harry Clark, Hector Roberts, Don Yeaman, Ron Cook, ?, ?, Len Perrin. (CNE, 1955)



Mr Baggs with some members of Opti-Corps (1957)



Opti-Corps in front of a church with two instructors from 2nd Signals (Ross Wilson on the left and Bill Self on the right) the guy in the middle with glasses and white gloves is Roy Lawrence, the drum major (Islington United Church, 1955)



Optimist Trumpet Band (Toronto City Hall, 1956)



Optimists Colour Guard (East York Collegiate, 1958)



Mayor Nathan Phillips presents the City of Toronto Flag to Phil Hennings, Drum Major the Toronto Optimists (1958)



Toronto Optimists winning first Nationals (Galt, 1958)



Toronto Optimists with St Lawrence Seaway Flag (1959) L to R: Don Chisolm, Bob Cook, Phil Hennings



Toronto Optimists (Guelph, 1959)



Toronto Optimists (Nationals, Galt, 1959)



Toronto Optimists (Preview of Champions, Jersey City, NJ, 1960)



Appears to be the first recipients of Optimists' 5 year rings (1960) L-R: Phil Hennings, Bob Owen, Ian Robertson, Bob Cook, Henry Beben, Harry Clark, Jim Patten, Ron Cook, Hector Roberts, Don Yeaman, Larry Cheevers, Mike Layton Note: Ed Nanni is missing



Toronto Optimists (St Catharines, 1961)



Toronto Optimists (1961)



Toronto Optimists (Rome, NY, 1961)



Toronto Optimists, the last performance in the corps' original uniforms (Junior Int'l, Varsity Stadium, Toronto, 1962)



Jim McConkey, DM, Toronto Optimists (Toronto, 1962)



Toronto Optimists (Metro Championships, Varsity Stadium, 1962)



Toronto Optimists on retreat after beating the Blessed Sacrament Golden Knights (first time in new uniforms, Rome, NY. 1962)



Jim McConkey conducts concert (Salamanca, NY, 1963)



Glen Durish, DM, Optimists mini-corps (Hull, QC, 1963)



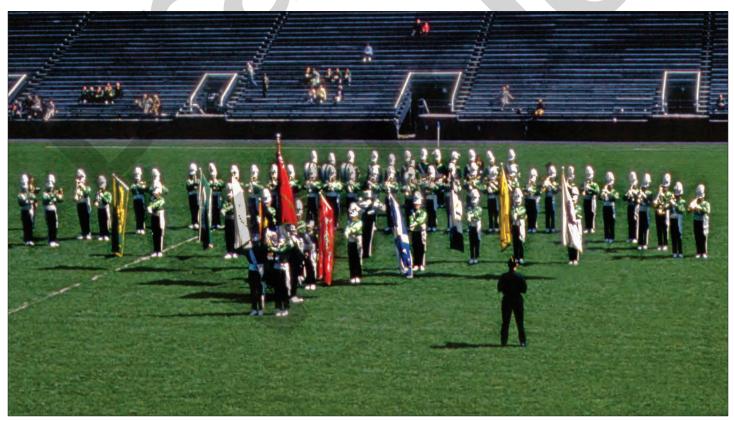
Toronto Optimists "El Cid" trio of Jeff Shimotakahara, Joe Gianna and Jack Roberts (prelims to Nationals, Waterloo, 1963)



Andy Henderson (L) and Vern Johansson, Toronto Optimists (Toronto Santa Parade, 1964)



Andy Henderson, DM, Bill Holloway and Doug MacKenzie (Menominee, MI, 1964)



Toronto Optimists (prelims to Nationals, Varsity Stadium, Toronto, 1964)



Bill Holloway and Barry Radford (movie shoot, Hamilton, 1965)



Toronto Optimists (Shawinigan, QC, 1965)



Toronto Optimists Colour Presentation (Sarnia, 1965)



Vern Johansson receives Nationals Trophy (Montreal, 1966)



Toronto Optimists (Nationals, Montreal, QC, 1966)



Doug MacKenzie, soloist, and Vern Johansson, Drum Major (Shriners International, Toronto, 1966)



Toronto Optimists (Sarnia, 1966)



Toronto Optimists (Nationals, Ottawa, 1967)



Toronto Optimists (Sarnia, 1967)



Toronto Optimists (Sarnia, 1967)



Toronto Optimists in summer parade uniforms (Sarnia, 1967)



Toronto Optimists (Grey Cup Parade, Toronto, 1968)



Toronto Optimists (Nationals, Kingston, 1968)



Toronto Optimists (Batavia, NY, 1969)



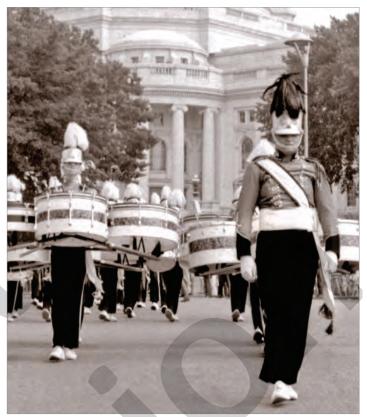
Toronto Optimists (Batavia, NY, 1969)



Toronto Optimists (Batavia, NY, 1969)



Toronto Optimists (Waterloo, 1970)



Toronto Optimists (Madison, WI, 1970)



Toronto Optimists (North American Invitational, Varsity Stadium, Toronto, 1970)



Toronto Optimists (Shriners Contest, CNE, Toronto, 1971)



Toronto Optimists (1971)



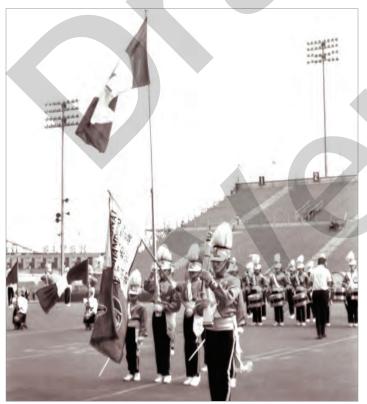
Toronto Optimists (Shriners International, CNE, Toronto, 1971)



Toronto Optimists (1971)



Toronto Optimists' silks (1972)



Toronto Optimists (Nationals, CNE, Toronto, 1972)



Peter Byrne, Toronto Optimists (Nationals, CNE, 1972)



Toronto Optimists (1972)



Toronto Optimists (1973)



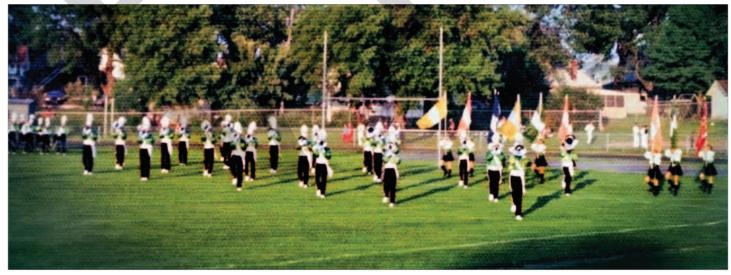
Toronto Optimists (1973)



Toronto Optimists (1973)



Toronto Optimists (1973)



Toronto Optimists (1973)



Toronto Optimists (CNE, Toronto, 1974)



Toronto Optimists (CNE, Toronto, 1974)



Toronto Optimists on retreat (1974)



Toronto Optimists (1975)



Toronto Optimists (Brantford, 1975)



Toronto Optimists (1975)



Toronto Optimists (Brantford, 1975)



Toronto Optimists (Brantford, 1975)



Toronto Optimists (Brantford, 1975)

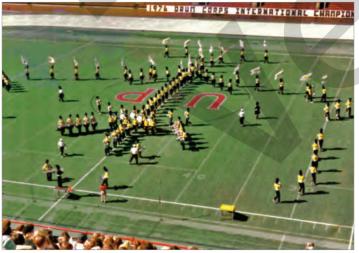
Seneca Optimists: 1976



Seneca Optimists (Michigan City, IN, 1976)



Seneca Optimists (Michigan City, IN, 1976)



Seneca Optimists (DCI, Philadelphia, PA, 1976)



Seneca Optimists (Michigan City, IN, 1976)



Seneca Optimists (Michigan City, IN, 1976)



Seneca Optimists (DCI, Philadelphia, PA, 1976)

Seneca Optimists: 1977



Seneca Optimists (DCI Finals, Denver, CO, 1977)



Seneca Optimists (1977)



Seneca Optimists (Pueblo, CO, 1977)



Seneca Optimists (1977)



Seneca Optimists (CYO Nationals, Lawrence, MA, 1977)



Seneca Optimists (CYO Nationals, Lawrence, MA, 1977)

Seneca Optimists: 1978



Seneca Optimists (DCI East, Allentown, PA, 1978)



Seneca Optimists (DCI East, Allentown, PA, 1978)



Seneca Optimists (DCI East, Allentown, PA, 1978)



Seneca Optimists (DCI East, Allentown, PA, 1978)

Every legend has a beginning.

Every legend transforms itself into a never-ending story told time and again by those that were part of its unfolding.

None of us will recall how things ended.

No, we prefer to remember how things were when we were Optimists.

The legend lives on... in all of us.





A Few More Photo Memories

It's hard to do justice to our history in just a few photos, so we've added an additional photo for each year. There are so many more photos that we could add, but we had to stop somewhere.



Toronto Optimists on the field at De La Salle (1958)



Toronto Optimists (Preview of Champions, Jersey City, NJ, 1959)



Toronto Optimists' Honour Guard (Buffalo, NY, 1960)



Toronto Optimists (Ice Follies, Maple Leaf Gardens, Toronto, 1961)



Jim McConkey, Drum Major and the Toronto Optimists on retreat (Rome, NY, 1962)



Toronto Optimists (Allegheny County Fair, Pittsburgh, PA, 1963)



Andy Henderson, Drum Major, and Toronto Optimists (1964)



Toronto Optimists (Nationals, Varsity Stadium, Toronto, 1965)



Toronto Optimists (Sarnia, 1966)



Toronto Optimists (Sarnia, 1967)



Toronto Optimists (Hanover, ON, 1968)



Toronto Optimists (Michigan City, IN, 1969)



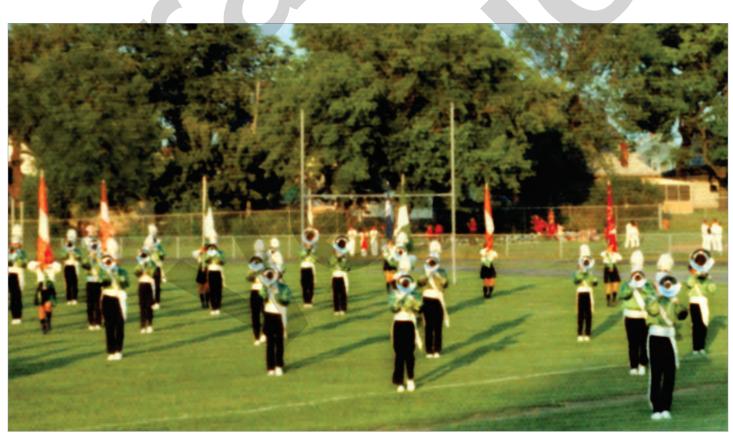
Toronto Optimists (North American Invitational, Varsity Stadium, Toronto, 1970)



Toronto Optimists (Indoor Guard Contest, St Michael's College School, Toronto, 1971)



Toronto Optimists (Big 10 prelims, Hamilton, 1972)



Toronto Optimists (1973)



Toronto Optimists (1974)



Toronto Optimists (1975)



On the front steps of De La Salle, 1958



Nationals prelims, Varsity Stadium, 1964



DCI East, Allentown, 1978



Copyright©2025