

Chapter 27: 1977 – The Only Way To Go

With most of the Corps' executive and instructional staff still intact from last year, prospects looked good for the year ahead. More importantly sponsorship was still there. Officially there were three, Seneca College, the Optimist Club of York-Toronto, and the Seneca Optimists Booster Club.

There were changes within all of these departments, but all were to prove beneficial.

Mr. Rex Martin was now the President of the Booster Club. He had held this position with the Toronto Optimists.

The executive consisted of:

Al Tierney..... Director
Ric Brown..... Assistant
Evert Botterweg..... Equipment Manager
Don Daber..... Publicity, public relations, etc.

The instructional staff had changed but had full complement.

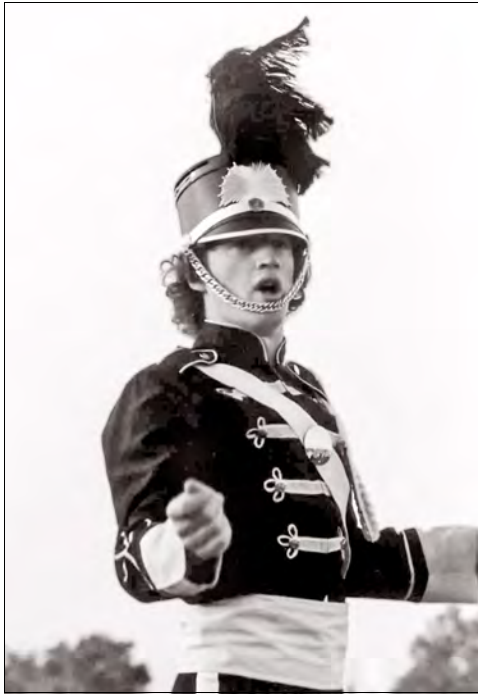
M&M Field Design. . . . Gary Czapinski
M&M Instruction. Greg Oxenham, Gilles Paquin, Tom Furiano, Doug Coull
Colour Guard. Marie (Kas) Grana, Wendy Paquin, Debbie Miller
Bugle Arrangements.... Wayne Downey
Bugle Instructors.. . . . Peter Byrne, Myron Melnyk, George Nasello, Wayne Dillon
Drum Arrangements.... Sam Kays, Pat Irvine
Drum Instructors.. . . . Sam Kays, Pat Irvine, Bill Bula, Wayne Lewis

Most of these people were home grown, but originating with various Corps. Those who were from elsewhere, the United States mainly, were occasional, coming for long weekends, or camps. These were Gary Czapinski, Marie Grana, Wayne Downey, and sometimes Fred Sanford on drums. All others listed were permanent staff. They were greatly responsible for what appeared on the field, the occasional instructors adding invaluable advice and knowledge. With this crew, things should go well.

Peter Byrne, on bugles, had started in Corps at the age of eleven. Joining Grantham, he spent a few years in Optimists then had played for one year in the Anaheim Kingsmen, winners of the first D.C.I. Championship. He claimed that his biggest problem as an instructor was adjusting to a D.C.I. calibre Corps. Well, whatever, he had done well so far and was to continue this year.



1977: Seneca Optimists members on a bus



1977: Mike Williams, Seneca Optimists Drum Major

In 1976, Seneca Optimists at one time or another had beaten all but four Corps, Blue Devils, Madison Scouts, Santa Clara Vanguard, and Phantom Regiment.

Myron Melnyk, one of Peter's assistants, was a member of De La Salle for six years. He had wanted to stay on as an instructor, but it did not work out. He played in the Blue Devils for one year and, returning, went to the Princemen, until the 1975 Nationals, then, the Optimists. Feeling out of place at first, understandably, with his history, he eventually fitted in and stayed.

Sam Kays, on drums, had originated with the Midlanders Drum Corps. He had scored the highest score in his caption at an individuals, highest score of the day.

Under Wendy Paquin, on silks, and Debbie Miller, rifles, the colour guard had made, and maintained, a reputation as one of the best in North America. This year, they were to get off to a slow start, but making up for lost time, were to come through again.

The Corps itself was full in all sections, with a full marching complement of 128.

Bugles.	58
Percussion.	32
Guard: flags.	24
Guard: rifles.	10
Nationals Colour Party. . . .	2
Officers.	2

Most of these were from last year, but there had been some turnover, almost inevitable. Some of the rookies, this year, had interesting backgrounds.

Jacques Dicaire, from Quebec, was a baritone player. He came from 4th Brigade and wanted to play in a D.C.I. Corps during his last year.

Janice Bell, a soprano player, had started in drum corps at age 10, with the Peterborough Krescendos. She had been their Drum Major in 1976.

Johanne Briere had joined Corps when 12 years old. She had marched with Mousquetaires, Chatelaines, and 4th Brigade. Also, she had taught drumming to several Quebec Corps. A unique distinction was that she was the first girl to march in the drum line in the history of the Corps. Girls were now commonplace in the corps but none had been in the drum line, until now.



1977: Seneca Optimists rehearsing

Finally, Sylvain Menard, contra bass had been in Corps since age 13, with 4th Brigade. He joined Seneca and was a Seneca Optimist nut.

The Drum Major this year would be Mike Williams while the Colour Guard Captain would be Dianne Tenaglia. Dianne was a graduate of the Optimist Cadets, moving to the junior Corps in 1974.

Altogether, twenty-five members of the Corps were from out of town. One of them, Tony Lidstone had, last year, and would, this year, hitchhike twice a week for practices from Kitchener, Ontario, 100 miles away.

Across town, the Oakland Crusaders reportedly also had a full 128-member Corps. A difference was that they had had a big turnover, and many of these people were new.



1977: Northstar from Kitchener

Other potential competition, the new “Northstar” Corps from Kitchener was an unknown quantity. Directing them, now, was Doug MacKenzie.

The Optimists Cadets Director was now John O’Leary.

The Ontario Drum Corps Association had a lot of familiar names on its roster. Jack Roberts, former Optimist player and instructor was now the Executive Director. Al Tierney, Seneca Optimists Director, was President of the Association. Don Daber was Secretary Treasurer, John Jones of Oakland was Vice-President, Recording Secretary was Jacqui Kennedy and other directors were Dick Brown, Jim Towie and Jack Turner. I mention all these people because without them there would be no Drum Corps.

Back to the Corps.

The horn lines had improved steadily over the last couple of years, those of Optimist and Seneca. Last year, after the merger, Myron Melnyk had started a program to improve tone and intonation. This had paid off, but consistency was the biggest factor. Each performance was better than the last, except for D.C.I. finals.



1977: Seneca Optimists (DCI)

Things moved ahead rapidly even though quite a bit of music had been changed for this year. Off-the-line was still Mahler’s 7th Symphony, but with a modified entry. The lively

“Children’s Dance” led in to concert which, as yet, had not been selected. A long drum solo then displayed changes. Congas and Bongos had replaced triple drums. “Pippin” from a musical of the same name followed. Changes and alterations would occur, but basically this show was of D.C.I. calibre. The concert, which was selected later, would be a medley from “West Side Story”. This music was the most challenging ever played by the Drum Corps.

Drill rehearsals began in January. The double gym at Seneca College was large enough for the whole Corps to learn and practice parts of the 1977 drill. Later, it could all be put together outside.



1977: Seneca Optimists

On January 21st and 22nd, the O.D.C.A. Symposium 5 was held. It was considered a fabulous success. The largest symposium ever held for Drum Corps in North America. Presented by the O.D.C.A. and C.J.A., over 500 instructors, managers, and judges took part.

For the bugle clinic, the horn line of the Seneca Optimists was used for demonstrations. Wayne Downey conducted sessions on both days. The Oakland Crusaders drum line was used for the drum clinic, with Fred Sanford conducting. M&M was handled by Mike Maxley, Gary Czapinski, Marie Grana, and Len Kruszecki.

This year’s “award of merit” went to Barry Bell. It was overdue.

At the conclusion, over 600 people assembled for dining and socializing. Al Tierney opened the program. At the head table was the Hon. Robert Welch, Ontario Minister of Culture and Recreation. He was partly responsible for the “Wintario” program, from which Drum Corps had benefited greatly. Bob Duggan and Al Tierney, directors of Oakland and Seneca, respectively, received “special awards” for their two Corps. This recognized the accomplishments of both in



1977: Seneca Optimists (DCI)

international competition. These were presented by Mr. Welch. The fact was highlighted that Toronto was the only city in North America with two Corps in the D.C.I. top twelve. A distinction probably not recognized outside of Drum Corps circles.

A letter in “Information Drum Corps” slammed the publication for its definite slant towards the Seneca Optimists. This magazine printed what was sent in to it. Only a few co-operated.

Another letter was received, from Nonie and Bernie Beer, who were wintering in Florida. They wanted, and were getting, “Information Drum Corps”.

Al Tierney and Bob Duggan represented the O.D.C.A. at a D.C.I. Management Seminar in Chicago.

Two measures of note, in March, were:

- ▶ The first issue of “Gold Capsule Comments”.
- ▶ The Seneca horn line got the new 2-valve bugles.

Though costly, these new 2-valve bugles were necessary if the Corps wished to remain competitive.

Seneca College announced that it would sponsor a D.C.I. contest this year. Don Pesceone and Bill Howard, both from the D.C.I. Executive Board, came to the college to discuss this with the people listed below.

- Peter Shore. President of the Optimist Club of York-Toronto
- Joe Gianna. Past President
- Rex Martin. President of the Seneca Optimist Booster Club
- Al Tierney. Corps Director
- Wolfgang Petschke. . . . Corps Co-ordinator with the College

Another merger had taken place. The Lancers, in a final break with the Optimist organization, merged with the Oakland Crusaders Parade Corps. It was planned to increase it to 80 boys and girls and would be known as the Etobicoke Knights.

At the O.D.C.A. individuals this year, sponsored by the Oakland Crusaders, the Seneca Optimists took nine firsts. The Oakland Corps outdid them with eleven. The Seneca Optimist Brass Quintet scored 89.5 for their first place. The “Mellow Yellow” also recorded numerous seconds and thirds. All this was reported in the April issue of “Gold Capsule Comments”.

In May, Wayne Downey flew in from California, bringing the new concert of West Side Story. This was the Victoria Day weekend, for the Corps, a camp weekend. It began with a T.A.S. night, a custom inherited from the Toronto Optimist’s side of this Corps. Drill-wise, Gary Czapinski introduced the “parachute” a novel idea for general effect. It was to amaze audiences all over. With camp over, everything intended had been accomplished. It was less than two weeks to the first contest, which was on June 3rd, in Toronto. It was the International, sponsored by the Seneca Optimist Booster Club. No one was ready. Due to this, the Oakland Crusaders pulled out of it. Their problems would become apparent later. Everybody else competed.



1977: Seneca Optimists (DCI)

Seneca Optimists were eager to go against the new Corps “Northstar”, to see what would happen. What happened was the Seneca Optimists won by nine points, even with a two-point penalty. Their show was shaky, and the concert showed that it had been played for less than two weeks. But a win is a win, and now they only had to go against the Oakland Crusaders, to see where they stood in Canada.



1977: Seneca Optimists rehearsing

It was not heavy competition time yet. That would be here soon enough. The next day, another Optimist tradition was observed. Nobody seemed to mind. They were all in fun. This one was M.O.O.G., Most Organized Optimist Games, always reserved for the day after the first concert. It took place on Toronto Island, starting around 12:00 noon. Egg-throwing contests, mooger ball, tug-o-war, and buck-buck were all part of the fun 'n games. The Booster Club showed up later to cook hamburgers and hot dogs. The last ferryboat left at 12:45 a.m., with the last partiers. After this, things would get more serious.

Gold Capsule Comments came out this June, but, surprise, it would be the last issue this year. Due to printing costs, it would now only appear from January through May. There would be a yearbook though.

The Corps had twenty-seven contests scheduled to date. This could change, either up or down, but probably not very much. Coverage of them will be condensed as much as possible.

June 11th – Waterloo

Seneca wins, already starting to come together, doing the type of show one would expect from a D.C.I. Corps. The next week it was a two-stop trip to the United States. For the first time this year, the competition included the Oakland Crusaders. This Corps had suffered a large turnover in personnel, and it showed. Seneca Optimists were second, two points behind Garfield, and, unheard of before, twelve points up on the Oakland Crusaders. The “Oakies” scored high drums. Their drum line was superb. Everybody could see that. Next day, it was Waverly, N.Y. and, again, a second place to Garfield. The score for our Corps was in the 67-68 range. Back in



1977: Seneca Optimists Conga (DCI)

Canada, on the 25th in Welland, Ontario, another win, both parade and contest. The number “Children’s Dance” clicked for the first time. It was a difficult piece. The score was 74.30, an improvement, but now only six points above the Crusaders.

Now, in Port Dover, Ontario, on the warm shores of Lake Erie, was the second Corps camp. Other Corps were there too, and all put on an exhibition for the townsfolk. “Ventures”, the fine Girls’ Corps, made breakfast for the Seneca Corps



1977: Seneca Optimists

the next morning. A party was held at the home of Mark Lewis, a Corps member, his parents, Mr. & Mrs. Lewis, being most accommodating. The final day of camp was spent perfecting the “parachute” maneuver, for more U.S. competition the following weekend. This brainchild of Gary Czapinski, when executed properly was sensational, drawing oohs and aahs from many crowds.

The U.S. competition was actually to last four days. It was to prove a gruelling trip.

After an exhibition at an Argonaut football game, it was away, off to Ramsey, N.J. The guard was issued new flags, and the Corps did an inspired performance. It was the first showing of the “parachute”, and the reaction was one of stunned amazement, before the cheers. This show was a good one for this Corps, placing third. Four points behind Phantom Regiment, in first, and only 2.3 behind the Madison Scouts. The closest they had ever been. That was July 8th.

The very next day, the contest was in Allentown, PA, and it was D.C.I. East, the first big show of the season. The Corps for some reason was mediocre, placing sixth, at both prelims and finals. We were off, now, to Boston, for the C.Y.O. Nationals. The tour routine was practice, compete all day, ride, sleep all night. Seneca was again in sixth place, with a score of 74.35, almost identical to that of Allentown.



1977: Gary “Chops” Czapinski and Marie

It was here, in Boston, that the flaws in the Etobicoke Crusaders presentation became evident. They did not seem to have the show or personnel to make up the necessary ground. They would pull themselves up but they had old music with an uninspired drill. Tonight it was 10th place, with a score of 64.35.

Seneca Optimists, though, were on their way.

The next show was one they had been waiting for all year. Last year had been their first appearance at it, and the crowd had loved them. This was proven by the fact that at their rehearsal there was a large crowd. Word was out that the Seneca were here.

Leaving Boston at midnight, they neared Montreal at daybreak. The show that night was the best, so far, of the season with the crowd showing its enthusiasm. Montreal, July 11, 1977.

1st	Madison.....	80.80
2nd	Phantom Regiment	80.30
3rd	Seneca Optimists.	78.10
4th	Kingsmen	69.60
5th	Oakland Crusaders	66.15
6th	Royal Crusaders	65.05
7th	Velvet Knights.	52.05

The Seneca Guard was in the top three.



1977: Northstar Rifle

The same placings, and almost the same scores, occurred on July 15th in Toronto. This was the show sponsored by Seneca College, and marked the return of D.C.I. to Toronto, after a three-year absence. Again, with Madison first and Phantom second, Seneca Optimists were third, 2.8 out of top spot. This was, for this Corps, a period of new highs. Oakland Crusaders, with only 109 people on the field, were still having their problems. Still, although in fifth place with 67.55, and almost eleven behind Seneca, they captured the top drum score. This would happen all year, against all the best. The “parachute”, playing to new faces wherever it went, was partly responsible for the standing ovation received by the Seneca Optimists. Their concert of “West Side Story” was being compared to that of the Madison Scouts. Things, during this period, looked very rosy for this Corps. This early, on July 15th, it looked as if they could go a long way. They would, but a flaw was to appear later that would slow things down a bit.

The Ontario Provincial Championships, on July 23rd, saw the Seneca Optimists win their first major title. Oakland Crusaders, defending champions, put forth a supreme effort and managed to draw within five points of the new Canadian powerhouse.

1st	Seneca.....	81.75
2nd	Oakland.....	76.85
3rd	Northstar	71.75



1977: Seneca Optimists snare line



1977: Seneca Optimists

It was here that it was noted that the Crusaders drum line had beaten those of all the D.C.I. Corps that they had met.

At this contest, the Peterborough Krescendos won their division. They had reverted to Junior “B” from Junior “A”. The Seneca Optimists now dominated junior “A” in Canada, with the Oakland Crusaders and Northstar still possible contenders. The Corps director for Northstar was now Doug MacKenzie, a former Optimist.

Next day, in Kingston, and a week later in Simcoe, Ontario, it was the same story, with Seneca in first, maintaining, and even increasing the spread.

North Tonawanda, on August 1st, was something of an event. The Corps was an hour late on the line, holding up the show, as they were due on first. Why? The equipment truck was late. Why? U.S. customs officials held it up at the border, until a dog had inspected it, sniffing for drugs. Fortunately, it was drug free, so the truck and myself, the driver,

were allowed to continue. With a police escort, we found the stadium. It was thought that my assistant, Bob Carell, and I had stopped for a long lunch, or more. Whatever, the Corps went out and, with an 82.30, still won the contest. The truck had been held up once before, prior to tour one, when involved in a minor accident on Hwy. 401. Before police were informed, due to a pressing schedule, the driver took off. He was a wanted man when he returned. The police understood but a stern warning was issued.

As an aside, had drugs been found on the truck, prior to Tonawanda, it would probably have been game over for the Corps and the driver. U.S. customs officers do not fool around. It was a good thing that none were found because two days later, on Wednesday, August 3, tour two would begin. This was the big one that would end in Denver, Colorado with D.C.I. finals.

Tour Two

Day 1 – Wednesday, August 3rd

After a noon hour rehearsal at Keating Park, delayed due to a late equipment truck, the Corps reassembled at Seneca College. From there, it was onto the buses and heading westward to Ypsilanti, Michigan. The 1977 D.C.I. tour was underway.

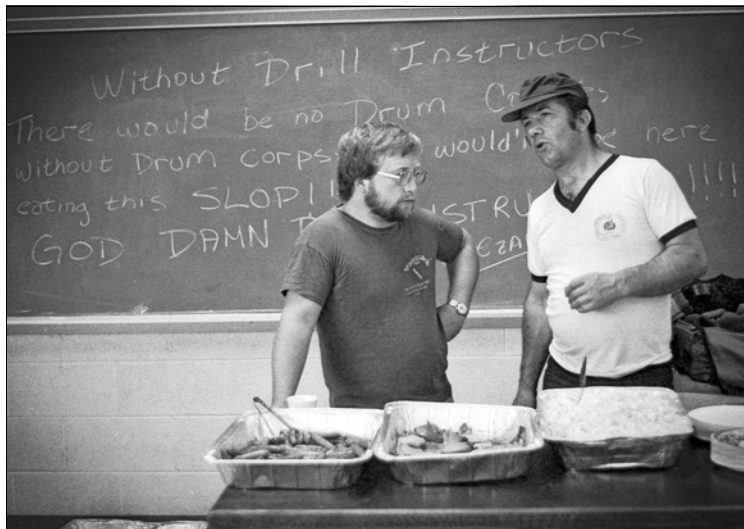


1977: Seneca Optimists (DCI Finals)

Day 2 – Thursday, August 4th

D.C.I. North, Ypsilanti

The whole Corps was up at 7:00 a.m. for the first meal at “Konstantinou’s Kafe”. A father of one of the girls in the Corps, John Konstantinou was a most valuable member of the staff. Cooking was his profession, and he was accustomed to catering for a large crowd, in this case, 150-160 people. Throughout the entire tour, he and his assistants, under his direction, were to capably keep the Corps and staff well fed. All this on a couple of bar-b-que type open griddles. It was a demonstration of great skill. Not because of John’s breakfast, the Corps had a bad rehearsal, after which it was off to the stadium for the prelims. A good performance gave a score of 77.30. It was a better show at the finals, moving up to 79.30, but with no change in standings.



1977: Our servers – Steve Malloy & John Konstantinou

Day 3 – Friday, August 5th

After another gourmet breakfast, it was away to Marion, Ohio, for the U.S. Open Contest.

Day 4 – Saturday, August 6th

U.S. Open, Marion, Ohio

All were very excited about this show, as there was a strong possibility that this Corps could become the first Canadian unit to win this title. Appearing early for the prelims, 11:19 a.m., the spirit showed with a score of 81.95 for first place, a close second, by 0.5, were the Crossmen of Pennsylvania.

Following this, an afternoon practice, of the kind that makes a championship Corps, set the stage for the evening finals. Then, rain, rain, rain. Some Corps got their shows over, and the rain eventually seemed to end at 10:30 p.m. There were still five Corps yet to perform when it started again heavier than ever. Executives, sponsors, and judges all met and decided to wait it out.

Finally, Seneca Optimists got on the starting line at 1:45 a.m. Sunday morning. The show was fantastic, and it had to be, as the Crossmen were also fantastic.



1977: Jim Kane with U.S. Open trophy

The result:

1st Seneca Optimists. . 85.05
2nd Crossmen. 84.85

The Corps became hysterical. The Crossmen were downcast. Both were excellent, and it was anybody's show. However, the "Eagle" trophy came to Canada for the first time.

In the class "A" division, as opposed to the "Open" division, the Cardinals of Precious Blood won the title. They were from Scarborough, Ontario, so it was a great day for Canadian Drum Corps.



1977: Seneca Optimists

Day 5 – Sunday, August 7th

This was a travelling day, to Alton, Illinois, with a stop in Indianapolis for lunch. A treat was the view of the St. Louis skyline. Arriving in Alton, the Corps was greeted by a monstrous thunderstorm, with tornado warnings posted for the city.



"Youth on the March" saw this Corps give, for them, an unsatisfactory performance. Again, a third place finish.

Now it was on to Wichita, Kansas. On the route were seen the Mississippi River, the Missouri River, and the Stadium of the Kansas City Royals baseball team. Such diversions were good, as most of these tours were work, travel, and sleep. There was not much time for fun. Home base this time was a local Salvation Army Camp. As might be expected, it was a neat, well kept place. A rehearsal in the late evening was interrupted by the local sheriff. An angry housewife had alerted him, and the practice had to be called off. Such problems are common to Drum Corps, loud as they are.

Day 8 – Wednesday, August 10th

These contests were labelled with appropriately colourful names. "Drums Across the Plains" was the name of this one. It could have been the title of a western movie. Practice was difficult because this turned out to be the hottest, most hurried day of the tour. However, everybody

would be in the same boat, so things were equal. For the Seneca Optimists, the practice field was less than perfect. Up hill, down hills, trees, high grass. Attacking indians would not have been out of place here. Struggling though a rehearsal as well as could be done, the reward was a most spectacular performance at the actual show. They thought they had finally defeated the 27th Lancers. Alas, it was still third place. Again.

A very low drum score contributed to this. Also M&M was not up to its usual standard. Due to rain, it was a drum majors only retreat. Back to the camp and a change of plans. Instead of staying over, it was decided to push on to Denver that night.

Day 9 – Thursday, August 11th

Arrival in Denver was to a cool 50° F, up in the mountains now. Settling into a school in Sheridan, a suburb of Denver, the practice facility was examined. It turned out to be excellent. It was just down the road, part of the “Fort Logan Mental Health Centre”. When the Corps practised some of the staff and inmates came out to watch the proceedings. Somebody commented that they must have felt right at home.

While at this location, the Corps would participate in several contests, in scattered locations, some quite a distance away.

August 12th, the day after arriving, was spent rehearsing for the entire day. There would be little rest at this end of the tour. Next day, it was off to Glenwood Springs, 185 miles west. It took five hours and turned out to be the most colourful and exciting part of the whole tour. Until now, we



1977: Bernadette and Colin as Corps members take a food break in Colorado



1977: Seneca Optimists

thought that we were in the Rockies, but actually were only in the foothills. On this trip, we had a glimpse of the real Rockies, and they were awesome to us dudes. Through Glenwood Springs to the mining town of Carbondale. “Drums Along the Rockies” saw the Seneca Optimists put on a good performance, placing four points behind Santa Clara Vanguard. This was good for this Corps. After a dip in the local “Hot Springs” courtesy of free passes from the contest sponsor, it was back through the mountains to Denver.

The return trip was interesting with breakfast in Glenwood Canyon, beside the Colorado River, some mountain climbing, and collecting rock samples for the folks at home. The busses picked up some members of Northstar, whose bus had broken down. Finally reaching Denver, the Corps continued east to Greeley, Colorado.



1977: Seneca Optimists congas (DCI Finals)

This was another “Drums Along the Rockies” as was the next one after it. It was a good show, as most of them now were, but the Seneca Optimists could still not defeat the 27th Lancers.

Day 13 – Monday, August 15th

South 115 miles to Pueblo, and the last chance to beat a major Corps before D.C.I. prelims. It was a chance neglected, losing even to the Kilties for the first time. Hard work lay ahead, but there was not much time. We had not even met the Blue Stars or Cavaliers yet.

Day 14 – Tuesday, August 16th: A day off at last.

Day 15 – Wednesday, August 17th

Devoted entirely to practice for the imminent D.C.I. prelims.

Day 16 – Thursday, August 18th: D.C.I. Preliminaries

It was here, the prelude to the culmination of the tour, D.C.I. preliminaries. For some, it would be the final tilt on this circuit, this year.

Arriving in plenty of time for a good warm-up, the Seneca Optimists were the first Corps on. After stepping off to what was their best show of the season, chances looked good for the Seneca Optimists. Too good. The score sheets saw them finishing in 9th place overall, lower than expected. However, what’s done is done, and next day was the finals.



1977: Seneca Optimists “parachute” at DCI prelims

Day 17 – Friday, August 19th

D.C.I. Finals

All the work of the past year had been aimed at this contest. This was it! Now!

Excitement ran high within the Corps, and it grew with the size of the crowd, 30,000 plus, the only crowd of this size on the tour. Applause for the “parachute” number was a thunderous frenzy from a crowd this size. Also, cheering for the Seneca Optimists were the Northstars and the Oakland Crusaders. These two Corps had not made it into the finals. Setting aside any past rivalry, they all cheered lustily for the Seneca Optimists. In a fine display of national unity the Oakland Crusaders displayed a Canadian flag.



1977: Seneca Optimists (DCI Finals)

In the exalted company, which was at this show, nobody could tell how they had done on the field. All the other eight Corps were watched, while waiting for the retreat.

The Retreat

A very un-D.C.I. like spectacle followed. Disorganized and, at first, for the Seneca Optimists, disappointing. They tied for eight place with the Capitol Freelancers, with a score of 82.40. Disappointing because the Corps had set out this year with aspirations to a higher standing. Later, though, it was decided that this was an accomplishment. It was. Eighth best in the world, against more experienced units, and only in their second year. De La Salle and Oakland Crusaders, one and the same really, had placed higher at earlier finals, but, nevertheless, it was still a major feat. Just to enter the top twelve was. Many dozens tried. Eventual recognition of what they had done made all the time, work, and pains seem worthwhile. Very few Corps achieved this. They had done their best and had reason to be proud. Looked at from a different viewpoint, out of 4-5 billion people in the world, they were now in the top 1,152 in their field.



1977: Seneca Optimists Parachute (DCI Finals)

Now, all the excitement over, it was time for the long haul back to Canada. First stop, Lincoln, Nebraska where, arriving late, an appearance at the State Capital was missed. Given the night off.

Next stop, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, arriving late again, one bus, an exhibition at the Wisconsin State Fair was missed.

Day 20 – Monday, August 22nd – Last day!

The guard bus and drum bus dashed straight for home, while the horn bus took its time, stopping at a McDonalds in Michigan. The equipment truck was stopped at the border, it, and its entire contents, being confiscated in the name of the Government of Canada. The Corps, as of now, ceased to exist. Some phone calls to Toronto, and back, cleared up the misunderstanding and the truck proceeded on its merry way, the Corps now being back in business. All agreed that the C.N. Tower was a sight for sore eyes.



1977: Seneca Optimists (DCI Finals)

Still to come, in Canada, were the Canadian Nationals, and it took some adjustment to prepare for it. To recover somewhat from the rigours of the tour, Tuesday and Wednesday were taken off. Practices both Thursday and Friday were poor, being hard to get into with enthusiasm. It was a now familiar situation. After the D.C.I. finals, anything else seemed an anticlimax.

The right attitude finally returned on Saturday, just in time. One hundred percent attendance at rehearsal and high spirits showed that the Corps, again, meant business. It was the last chance to perform the show this year, and they were determined to make it a good one. It was!

Pulling out all the stops, the Corps performed as never before, doing their best show and to a hometown crowd. The biggest threat was the Oakland Crusaders, the defending champions. Over the course of the year, they had pulled themselves up by the bootstraps but it was not quite enough



1977: Seneca Optimists

The Seneca Optimists won their first Canadian National Championship by three points. Oakland Crusaders were to be credited. They had started the season 10-12 points behind.

A very brief review of the year shows that drum scores, noted in judges' comments, on score sheets and tape recorders, had hurt this Corps. It was an often heard comment that if Seneca's horns and Oakland's drums were combined, they could have taken on anybody. Possibly.

The “parachute” maneuver was the most effective part of the drill show. It drew much favourable comment.

The whole visual show was pleasing, so much so that its constant flowing movement somewhat overshadowed the music. It was a credit to Gary Czapinski and Marie Grana. The music ensemble was presented properly, and the music itself was of the right calibre for this level of competition.



1977: Seneca Optimists exiting “Parachute”

The only grey spot in this scenario was the low scores of the drums. Something was lacking, and the Corps would have placed higher had it not been. The overall impression at D.C.I. was, “watch out for this Corps next year”. Well, next year was next year, and many things could, and would, change by then.

Now was time for all the awards, congratulations, discussions, etc. Most of this all took place at the 2nd Annual Awards Banquet. This had been the second year of the Seneca Optimists, so this was the second banquet. The Toronto Optimists banquets had ended in 1975.

After a fine roast beef dinner, prepared by the Booster Club, Al Tierney, “Uncle Al”, gave a speech, his final one as Corps Director. He had had enough, but would be the Corps D.C.I. representative. Also, he could spend more time as the President of the O.D.C.A./C.D.C.A.. He was presented with a picture of himself, taken at the 1977 Nationals. His story has been covered before, and his contribution to the whole Drum Corps movement had been considerable.



1977: Seneca Optimists (DCI Finals)

Special presentations followed.

Numerous trophies, plaques, and mementos presented to different people for various reasons.

- 1977 Guard of the Year. . . . Debbie Biggs
- 1977 Drummer of the Year. . Tommy Sams
- 1977 Bugler of the Year. . . Enzo Morella
- 1977 Corpsman of the Year.. Mike Williams

These four were the most prestigious.

The least prestigious, indeed highly embarrassing awards, were the G.C.C. awards. Of course, these were meant to be humorous.

- “Biggest Boobs in the Drum Line” Award
- “Mouths That Roared” Award
- “Short Shorts” Winner
- “Most Gullible Person of the Year” Award
- “Miss Butterfingers” Award

These were just some of the “dreaded” awards, all helping to lighten things up.

After all this, the disco centre opened and the Corps enjoyed themselves after a most successful year.

There would be a yearbook for 1977, but it would come out much later. Most of the credit for this goes to Mike Grimes and his staff, who had worked on the 1976 yearbook. They wanted to make the 1977 one better and put out a first class publication. Anyone, who has one of these, or one of the Toronto Optimists books, has a keepsake for life. A letter from Don Daber, to the Corps, saluted Mike Grimes and his staff.

A final note for this banner year was that an advertisement on the back of “Yearbook ‘77 ” featured the Seneca Optimists horn line. It promoted DEG Dynasty bugles. Shown in the ad was Mr. Evert Botterweg who had been Equipment Manager of the Toronto Optimists for many years and was currently Equipment Manager for the Seneca Optimists. Evert had also conducted numerous clinics on Corps maintenance and equipment at both C.D.C.A. and D.C.I. Symposiums.

Dynasty bugles were used by a host of the top Corps so Seneca was in good company.

1978 lay ahead, together with an uncertain, unforeseen, future that was yet to unfold.



1977: Evert Botterweg and corps members (from a D.E.G. Dynasty advertisement)