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Elks Drum and Bugle Corps a Baker tradition

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Of the Baker City Herald

Vic Endicott joined the Elks Drum and Bugle Corps as soon as he could, back in 1961 when he was 14 years old.

“When I first started in the '60s, there was a waiting list,” he said. “It started out as an explorer post for the Boy Scouts. You'd go in at 14 and got out at 18.

“Nobody quit until they had to. That's why it was so hard to get in.”

Endicott still belongs to the group, which was reorganized to a senior corps in 1975.

When he became part of the Drum and Bugle Corps, Endicott played a bass drum, an instrument he still marches with today.

While the Drum and Bugle Corps is unique to the Baker Elks Lodge, there were several other marching musical units associated with the American Legion in the late 1960s and early '70s.

However, while the Elks group marched in parades and played at gatherings, the other corps played for another reason, competition.

The Elks players tried competing for a few years, Endicott said, but that didn't last long.

“They could beat us on the field, but we could beat them on the street,” he said.

They soon returned to their original appearances.

“It just wasn't as much fun as being out on the [street.](#)”

And they didn't just play on Baker streets.

The members 40 in all traveled around the country, performing where they were requested.

“This thing has been an institution. We put Baker on the map,” Endicott said.

He said the group has made trips around the U.S. and Canada, playing in Las Vegas, Chicago, Calgary, Dallas, Texas and San Francisco, and have played for several Oregon governors.

In the mid-1970s the Scouts Drum and Bugle Corps disbanded, only to be revived in 1975 by Roger Welter.

“He was the one who pulled it together and made us what we are today,” Endicott said.

The new corps was identified as the Elks Drum and Bugle Corps, dropping the Scouts affiliation.

“We were going to just do one parade, and we had so much fun we kept after it,” Endicott said.

The group usually gets quite a few requests for events to play, and the group members vote on which ones to attend.

“We can't do everything,” he said.

And, since some members live in Pendleton and the Tri-Cities, it can be tough to synchronize everyone's schedule.

“As long as we have a lot of notice, most of the time we can get together,” he said.

Their annual appearances include the August Shrine parade, Miners Jubilee parade in July, the Elks crab feed, plus three or four more, including the Strawberry Festival in Lebanon.

In 1990, the group traveled to the Elks national convention in Las Vegas.

“We played for every state in the Union” at the convention, Endicott said.

“We're still playing numbers these guys did back in the '60s,” said Steve Kleen, a member of the Elks Drum and Bugle Corps since 1990.

Even though the members may be spread out, the local residents keep up on practice time so they're ready for the next event.

“We all get together and practice once or twice a week.

“Most of our concerts are patriotic songs. When we do march, you'll always see the flag with us,” Endicott said.

Members of the Drum and Bugle Corps don't have to belong to the Elks Lodge, and musical experience isn't even required.

“Most of us had band or orchestra, and some just play by ear,” Endicott said.

A few, like Kleen, belonged to a military-affiliated drum and bugle corps prior to joining the Elks corps.

“Mine was kind of an easy turn to this,” Kleen said.

He plays the tenor drum now, but when he was practicing for 12 hours in the Navy Drum and Bugle Corps, he played the snare drum.

“You get really good at it,” Kleen said. He had a 20-year musical absence between leaving the Navy and joining the Elks group, so when he took it up again he switched to the tenor drum because he “wasn't as fast as I used to be.”

While there aren't many new members from the younger generation the youngest is 18 Endicott hopes the corps will keep marching for years to come.

“It's really good for Baker. I tell you, it's a one of a kind thing,” he said.

“It just gets in your blood and you don't want to quit it.”