

Early 1965

AN OPEN LETTER
TO MEMBERS AND PARENTS OF THE THUNDERBIRDS

As we near the start of our 8th year of operation, I feel that a review of our activities is in order, which might help us in determining our future plans.

This drum and bugle corps was organized in February 1958, the culmination of 8 years dreaming and planning from the time my son John was born. I had been in a 110 piece corps in Miami from 1932 to 1935, a college band thru 1938, Army and dance bands thru 1945, Harvey Seeds Post Am. Legion, 4 times National Senior Corps Champions, thru 1948, moved to Seattle in 1948 where I have been Director of the Hurricanes for 14 of the past 16 years, resulting in 7 State Championships. In 1949 I helped to organize the Nile Temple Shrine drum corps and was their Director for 5 years. In 1951 I was Director of the Seattle Chapter DeMolay Junior Drum Corps. In 1953 I helped to organize and taught for 1 year the Bremerton "Grenadiers" Senior Corps.

When my boy was old enough to join the Greenwood Boys Club, I went to Don Sante, the Director, and offered to start and teach a junior corps, under his club's sponsorship. Since his club had no funds for such a program, we both went to the Greenwood Commercial Club and secured a one year sponsorship, with a \$1000 contribution for uniforms and equipment. Sante sent notices to his 1200 members and we opened shop with 18 buglers and 18 drummers. I had secured used bugles on an open account thru my friendship with the Wenatchee Legion corps, and drums on a personal note through the St. Marks Cathedral Boy Scouts corps, plus a bit of scrounging among DeMolay, Legion and V.F.W. groups. The corps dues of .50 a week made the payments on the first \$800 contract for drums and bugles, co-signed by Mr. O'Leary of the Greenwood Commercial Club and Jack Avery.

In 1959 I secured a Getzen franchise so that the corps could buy new bugles at wholesale, we sold the old drums and bugles to a corps in Florida for \$900, and every year since we have been upgrading our equipment by selling our oldest horns to other corps and receiving approximately enough to pay for brand new ones. As the corps has grown in numbers we have added additional horns and drums, but the increase in dues and turnout donations has amortized the additional investment. There is not a single active member of this corps who participated in the first year's struggle to pay for "our bugles and drums", as they are now referred to, although one active member did have a drum issued to him which he kept for nearly a year without participating or paying dues. I'm afraid the first year's work was pretty much a "baby-sitting" operation with very little parent participation, until the corps was ready to hit the street.

We made our first parades during Seafair Week in 1958, with Mr. McCarville as Business Manager. Our first Legion Convention was Tacoma in '58, with Pasco putting on a field exhibition. Our corps and Longview were in the parade but weren't allowed on the field. This is the basis for Pasco's '58 Legion Championship. University Post 11 was our Legion sponsor in 58 and 59.

Our first field competition was the V.F.W. Convention in Tacoma in 1959. We were the only junior corps there, sponsored by Ballard Post, but we'll claim that as our first championship. We competed with Pasco for the first time in Yakima in 59, with movies to prove it, at the State Legion Convention.

1960 was a banner year under Jack Farmer as manager, when we won our first Grande Seafair Parade Trophy, and started a 4 year reign as the top parade corps in the state. We came in a close 2nd to Pasco at the Legion Convention in Pt. Angeles, sponsored by North Seattle Post, who gave us \$500 sponsor money for the year. Ray C. Roberts V.F.W. Post of Tacoma started sponsoring us in the fall of 1960, after a series of promotional visits by Jack Avery and Ed Grinolds. They gave us an average of \$850 a year for representing them each year thru 1963.

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1961 was a good year under Ton Leonard as manager, the corps, now called the Thunderbirds since leaving the sponsorship of the Greenwood Boys Club in 1960, scoring the first of 3 straight wins over the Tri-City Columbians at the Pasco competition, winning the VFW in Bellingham, and placing a fraction behind Pasco in Wenatchee at the State Legion Convention, the winning margin being the first appearance of Pasco's new uniforms.

The girls color guard had joined the corps in the fall of 1959, with Mr. Rod Stubbs starting the first of his five eminently successful years as their instructor. He was the corps business manager in 1962, which was the first year of real junior competition in the VFW. The Legion Drum Corps Commission had tried to legislate against any VFW sponsored junior corps from competing in Legion State Conventions. A Resolution was initiated by Jack Avery and endorsed by 15 Legion Posts, that persuaded the Legion Commission to rescind its ruling and opened the way for Pasco, Shamrocks, and the Blue Angels to seek VFW sponsors, in time for the 62 VFW convention in Walla Walla. Pasco was 1st, T'Birds 2nd, Shamrocks 3rd, Blue Angels 4th, with an exhibition by the Troopers. For the first time the T'Birds beat Pasco in the Legion State in Bellingham, and won the Pacific National Exposition Parade in Vancouver, B.C. for the first time, repeating in 1963.

1963 was a big year under Ed Grinolds as manager, the T'Birds winning every parade for a year, 1st in VFW in Aberdeen, 1st in Everett, 1st in Pasco, 1st in Music in Motion, 2nd to the Troopers in Angels Sing, and 6th in VFW Nationals. Our Thunderbird Cadets were organized under Mr. Grinolds regime, in recognition that in a couple of years a lot of our T'Birds would be graduating and we needed a replacement program. Mr. Stubbs and Mr. Avery started the recruiting program, aiming first at 6th thru 9th graders. Some younger brothers and sisters of T'Birds were allowed to train with the Cadets and participated in several parades in 1963, but it developed that some of the younger ones weren't able to keep up with the drill requirements, and several parade committees would not allow them to participate. However, the general ability level and spirit increased so rapidly that it was decided to enter the Cadets in field competitions, to give them the required seasoning and experience required for future positions in the T'Bird ranks. In 8 competitions they finished with one 4th, five 5ths, a 10th, and placed 13 out of 17 in the VFW Nationals. This placed them 5th best in the state. The proof that this training program was necessary and has been successful is evidenced by the advancement of 17 buglers, 6 drummers, and 15 colorguards to the ranks of the T'Birds in the past two years.

1964 started out with high hopes, the T'Birds winning their own Northwest Championships for the first time since Jack Avery initiated the annual competition as a T'Bird function in 1959. Mr. John O'Neal was the manager, who started an iron fist regime, with strict separation of the duties of the Music instructor, M & M instructor, and Color Guard instructor. This worked fine during the winter, when the corps was busy learning new music on a twice a week schedule, but there was a breakdown in the important area of co-ordinating music and drill for the summer. A number of planning meetings were held, lots of suggestions were submitted, but the drill just wasn't jelled by May. The drill patterns we had worked on at Sand Point during the winter were not utilized, but I was given the impression that new drills had been completed, which were to be entirely out of my area of instruction during the spring and summer. Another complication was the offer of help from a former corps member from the midwest, whose hiring by the Shamrocks disturbed a lot of our members. Some of our members were helping out another corps as instructors, which led to further complications as the summer season progressed. There is no denying the fact that a lot of the corps members had a legitimate reason for unrest and dissatisfaction with the way the corps was being run, or not run, during the summer.

Like an iceberg, quite often 90% of the problems are out of sight beneath the surface. From February to May we had no active business manager, due to reasons which we can charitably attribute to business pressures. In the summer of 63,

a committee of the corps parents executive board had called on my boss at Academy Organ and Piano Center and requested that he keep me away from the Thunderbirds practices, as my only purpose seemed to be to sell Titleist Rotaries to the corps. This was not too long after I had secured Academy as a co-sponsor for the Cadets, at \$50 a month. Needless to say this created an embarrassing situation between me and my employer, as I took lots of time off from my work during the ensuing year, to work with both corps. A number of people, corps officers' wives, to be explicit, have asked why I didn't work more with the T'Birds. It's a little hard to explain that you have been previously instructed not to interfere with any of the duties or authority of the Mand M instructor. On a number of occasions, early in the summer, when I attempted to iron out difficulties in the drill and music co-ordination, I received no co-operation from the corps, the drum major, and from management. A cat burned on a hot stove is reluctant to walk on a cold one thereafter.

I have been accused of usurping the authority of the business manager in the area of authorizing turnouts or making commitments for the corps. I can think of no occasion in the past two years when I haven't turned all requests for turnouts over to the manager. Last summer when there was a question whether we would attend the Music in Motion Contest, the deciding factor seemed to be whether or not the Shamrocks would use Duffield. After receiving this assurance from the director of the Shamrocks, I passed it on to the manager, and thereafter when a boy would ask me if we were going to compete in M in M, I would state that I was sure we would, our managers stipulations having been complied with.

I have worked for the good of all drum corps in the state for the past 16 years, being a member of the Washington State Drum & Bugle Corps Association all that time, and serving as president in 1964. I have been on the VFW Department of Wash. Drum Corps Commission for the past three years and was appointed chairman for 1964. I drew up a petition and circulated it to all the VFW Posts in the state, requesting department funds to be distributed among the Junior Corps competing in the State Convention. This resulted in the Junior Corps being included in the Junior Activities program for the year, with a budget of \$800.

I have secured all but two of our paying co-sponsors during the past 7 years. A typical year between 1963 and 1964 includes the following:

THUNDERBIRDS		CADETS	
RAY C ROBERTS, VFW	\$800	ACADEMY ORGAN&PIANO	\$450
Lk. WASH. POST, Legion	600	NORTHGATE KIWANIS	200
AURORA-GREENWOOD		BALLARB AUXILIA RY VFW	100
LIONS CLUB(Richardson)	600	FLETCHER DANIESSPOST VFW	250

I have waged a continuing fight with the Legion Drum Corps Commission to achieve official recognition for the Junior Corps, and to secure a fair share of the Department Prize Money, which was achieved for the first time in 64. Housing and mileage allowance from convention city corporations has been an annual battle.

Securing Parade turnouts and increasing the charges we have collected has increased our income over the past 7 years. There were no contests for Juniors when we started, there are now 10, plus any Nationals we might attend. Our members have done outstandingly well in State and National Individual and Quartette competitions, and I hope I have contributed some small part to this, by writing solos, and quartettes, and coaching in homes separate from corps practices. I feel that I have contributed to over 50% of the recruiting efforts in the past 7 years, calling on parents in their homes and helping turn trumpet and trombone players into buglers.

I have no "beef" with any one. I don't want to fire anyone, and I don't want to be "fired". I have known for several years that there has been a vocal minority who have worked hard for the corps, in their own way, but whose personal ambitions have been unsatisfied, or whose advice has not been taken. They have led campaigns to "get rid of Avery". Attempts have been made to prove my dishonesty or financial irresponsibility. In buying and selling instruments for the corps over the years I make no pretense in denying that I have been slow in settling my accounts with the corps on several occasions, usually during financial "hard times" at home, when my personal income has dipped below a living family level. When at the same time I have secured cash co-sponsors for \$600 to \$1000, I haven't felt too "unprincipled" in being slow in \$25 to \$50 collections. If I were in the business of making a living buying and selling drum corps equipment, the corps would have paid over \$5,000 more for its equipment in the past 7 years. I have never been paid a commission on any sale I have made to the corps of new equipment, since it has always been bought on a very close "cost plus" basis. On one occasion I told the board I thought I could get \$90 for a used horn and I later sold it to a Bremerton player for \$110, which he unfortunately paid in two payments, the first big payment going immediately to the corps, and the second small payment arriving some time later when I was out of work. In 1960 I spent two months income to go to the Legion Nationals to take movies and tape recordings of the "big corps" to upgrade our routines. The day I was leaving a sponsor made a cash payment to me for a turnout the corps had made on the way home from a state convention. I used the money to buy film and tape on the trip, which has been used numerous times for new ideas. On the other side of the coin, I have bought a "package" of used bugles, drums and other musical instruments from a dealer, to secure bugles for the corps at a very reasonable price, and then had to borrow from a finance company to pay for the instruments the corps didn't want, the interest on which has accumulated to more than \$100. There "must" be a better way to make a living, but it's certainly not in the drum corps business.

Somewhere along the way we have lost our concept of being a public service organization. We used to play for hospitals and children's homes and put on a Christmas party for the Northern State Hospital in Sedro Wooley. Now we are impressed with our ability to spend \$12,000 on a trip to the "Nationals", which apparently will take 2 years of our earning ability to pay off. I don't begrudge the corps members this trip, it was certainly a reward for long and faithful service in the corps, even though I was a bit curious why I wasn't invited to go at my own expense until 30 days before the trip, by which time I had made other plans with my family. The Shamrocks did take all of their instructors and their wives at the corps expense.

My main concern is that there seems to be a growing feeling that the Cadets should have no money committed to them for upgrading their uniforms and instruments. They take part in all the fund raising activities of the corps, pay the same dues, and bring in a known amount of revenue from co-sponsors and turnouts. Now that the State Association has approved the formation of a "B" Corps Circuit, the Cadets will be competing with the El Toreadors, Amigos, Blue Angels, Bel-Airs, Matadors, and Longview. They will be shooting for 1st place in their own league, and should be given the opportunity to field a good looking corps, with proper instrumentations. If we are to maintain their interest in becoming "T'Birds", and build up their abilities, they must be encouraged, with no intent of depriving the T'Birds of anything they need. If I am to continue teaching the Cadets, which I enjoy doing, there must be a year round program of upgrading, with a recruiting program to encourage 9th and 10th graders to start directly in the T'Birds, and a definite program of training 7th and 8th graders for two years. To evaluate these trainees I feel that I should be retained as Corps Director, with overall authority in Personnel, Music and Drill Co-ordination for both corps. According to the by-laws I have never been dismissed by the Parent Body, and there is no time limit to the appointment of Corps Director. My status must be defined for me to continue teaching for the benefit of all the Thunderbirds. I respectfully request a decision by the Parent Group.

Sincerely,
Jack Avery

OPEN LETTER TO PARENTS AND MEMBERS OF THE THUNDERBIRDS CORPS

It is very lamentable that the present situation has been allowed to develop, wherein a fine body of parents has become divided into two armed camps, jealous and suspicious of each other, with accusations being loosely thrown in all directions. The T'Birds parents seem to think that the Cadet parents are trying to subvert their efforts. The Cadets parents feel that theirs is a case of taxation without representation. The present management has been pursuing a policy of "get rid of Avery, at any cost, because he won't give us any buglers, and he has a silly idea that the Cadet Corps should be allowed to compete with the other B corps."

The facts in the case are that 24 playing members have moved up into the T'Birds in 2 1/2 years and 17 girls into the Color Guard. I doubt if the T'Birds would have achieved their past year's success if the Cadet graduates had just been operating as a parade corps for the previous two years, as is now being recommended by management for the coming year.

The personal vilification I have been subjected to for the past year is just a by-product of the deeper power struggle going on. In the past 8 years I have recruited over 80% of all the new members coming into the corps and have solicited over \$10,000 in contributions from co-sponsors and turnouts. Since February of 1963 I have solicited \$1,625 in donations from co-sponsors for the Cadets, and Mr. Stubbs has generated \$870 in donations from Woodrow Wilson and Cadet Color Guard activities. There has been a continuous effort in recruiting and training new members, averaging three days a week, the year round.

I am most anxious that the Cadets will always look forward to graduating into the T'Birds. I know that there is sufficient talent within the T'Birds now to perpetuate the calibre of performance they have achieved. Based on their results in the past two years I don't think they have the time or talent for recruiting new members to maintain their numbers.

For the good of the organization's future, I am recommending that the Cadet Corps be continued as a part of the Thunderbird organization, with separate management, elected by its own parent body, separate training, selected by its own management, separate financing and budgeting, based on its own co-sponsors, turnouts and fund raising promotions, and completely separate financial responsibilities. The membership of the Cadets will consist of 5th thru 9th graders, with 9th graders eligible to audition for membership in the T'Birds, with the option of remaining with the Cadets thru their 9th grade.

At the present time there are 13 9th grade level and up members of the Cadets who should certainly be able to replenish the ranks of the T'Birds lost to college and overage. If the above proposal is agreed upon by the combined parent group, and the new management of the Thunderbirds is more interested in perpetuating a harmonious organization than in promoting a personal vendetta against the Cadet management and instructors, The Thunderbirds can once again concentrate on beating the Shamrocks instead of wasting their energies fighting each other.

I feel there is an obligation to the co-sponsors who have contributed nearly \$2,500 (including the Wilson School activities) for the equipment funds of the Cadets, to continue the Cadets as a competition corps, with this amount of equipment assigned permanently for their use, by the present combined parent body. All future donations to and fund raising projects by the Cadets will remain the property of the Cadets. Combined projects by both corps will be divided equitably based on degree of participation. Enough said. Sincere parents, come vote!

Jack Avery