

The drum corps of West Seattle

by Pacific Northwest Drum Corps.com, specializing in PNW drum corps of the 1960s and 1970s

All corps listed below are Washington State junior corps except as noted. West Seattle is a peninsula separated from Seattle proper by the Duwamish River, named after the Native American people that have been living in the Seattle area since the last ice age 10,000 years ago.

The peninsula is connected to the main body of land far south of the Seattle city limits. The first bridge built to span that river at the north end of the peninsula, and connect Seattle with West Seattle, was built in 1900. Drum corps formed in West Seattle shortly after that.

There have been several drum corps to call West Seattle their home. A chronological list of all known West Seattle drum corps follows.

The first drum corps was the Seattle Boy Scouts drum & Bugle Corps

Formed approximately in 1926 (good heavens, that's almost 100-years ago!) and sponsored initially by the Boy Scouts of America then by Maple Leaf American Legion Post #21 of West Seattle. Maple Leaf Post started co-sponsoring that corps in June of 1933.

They'll Make the Rafters Ring Tonight



These young musicians - Harold Wright, Earl Wadsworth, Ward Cook and Stanley Nelson (left to right) - are members of the West Seattle Drum and Bugle Corps. They will be present at tonight's benefit show.

Thomas Hibben, a member of Maple Leaf Post, was the director and leader of the Boy Scout D&BC. This Troop performed throughout Puget Sound region all the way north to Bellingham and south to Olympia, earning many accolades in the process.

In the 1930s, traveling 90-miles north to Bellingham or 65-miles south to Olympia was a major road trip without today's interstate highway system. Our guess is that they hopped the train. (Left, 1936 West Seattle VFW junior, Post #2713)

The last known documentation for this corps was a recruitment ad in the local paper dated October 1938.

W. S. Drum and Bugle Corps to Celebrate



The West Seattle Drum and Bugle Corps, sponsored by VFW Post #2713 of West Seattle, will celebrate presentation of its colors Saturday night at Howacha playfield. The color guard (pictured above), left to right: Jim Peters, Edward Galton, Bob Thompson, George Ogden and Earl Wadsworth, drum major. The corps will drill between 8 and 9 o'clock. A benefit dance will follow.

The second corps was the West Seattle D&BC

This group was sponsored by Major George Farwell VFW Post #2713 of West Seattle. The corps ran from October 1935 through at least 1939. In 1936 they won the Peninsula Drum & Bugle Corps Championships at Port Townsend, 70-miles to the north. The group also won the VFW state contest in Vancouver, WA, in 1938 and 1939, in the Class A division. (Right, 1936, VFW Post #2713)

In 1938 they won the "Steilacoom Music Festival" for the third year in a row and got to keep that trophy in perpetuity (a popular thing at the time).



Their name varied slightly through the years and at times they had American Legion sponsorship as well as VFW, but they always belonged to West Seattle VFW Post #2713. (Left, West Seattle American Legion Post #160)
The third corps was the West Seattle AL Post #160 Senior D&BC

Their first known appearance was in 1952. They won the Washington State American Legion senior drum corps championships in 1955 and 1957. Their last known appearance was in Federal Way, WA, providing entertainment for a local event in September of 1965. Their street name was the Fusiliers (a 17th-century name for a soldier that carried a flintlock musket. Sweet.

The fourth was the El Toreadors D&BC

Formed in early 1961 by Jerry Chambers as the West Seattle Legion Juniors D&BC. They were sponsored by American Legion Post #160 (story above). In 1962 they

changed their name to El Toreadors. (Many junior and senior corps in the early 1960s adopted what I will call "street names" for their corps instead of using their AL or VFW Post names).

In 1963 Duane C. Andrews arrived from California and went to work as the music director for the Seattle Shamrocks. Mr. Andrews' formerly taught the Monterey Park Señoritas, a Spanish-themed all-girl corps in California. While he



1964 EL Toreadors



was instructing the Shamrocks (left, 1964), he also instructed El Toreadors, the Pacific Northwest's first Spanish-themed corps. In 1965 he co-founded the Bellevue Sentinels, the fourth Spanish-themed corps in the PNW.

In 1964, amidst parental squabbles, Jerry Chambers and his staff left El Toreadors and formed the Amigos. That left Bill Komorek as director of El Toreadors. He ran the corps from 1964 through the end of 1967 when they closed up shop. In 1968, Bill, his wife and daughters all joined the Bellevue Sentinels.

People who were with the Sentinels back in 1968 remember when the



Toreadors joined their corps. It was announced as a merger of the two corps, with El Toreadors furnishing approximately 10 to 15 members plus all their equipment to the Sentinels. (Remember, drum corps were smaller in those days. 80 members was a good-sized corps).

The last West Seattle DC, the Amigos D&BC.

The Amigos (below, 1965) were formed on May 11, 1964 by Jerry Chambers, formerly of the Toreadors, and ran until the end of the 1965 season. The Amigos were the result of a



Sentinels, in 1965. (Left, Monterey Park, CA, Señoritas, 1967)

All of this Hispanic drum corps activity going on in West Seattle. Who knew? Six degrees of separation, indeed!

The only other local Hispanic drum corps not mentioned in this article were the Matadors from Bellingham. They existed from 1963 through 1965. We'll save those guys for another day.

One more interesting detail . . . the Seattle Shamrocks that hired Duane C. Andrews from California in 1963, merged with the Bellevue Sentinels which Mr. Andrews co-founded in the fall of 1965. The merger took place in 1975. The new corps was called the Seattle Marksmen. (Below, 1975)



(Below, 1975)

"disagreement" within the Toreadors. He had his entire family involved in drum corps like so many other directors did. Jerry himself played soprano with the Seattle Hurricanes, Washington State American Legion senior champions in 1937, 1938, 1951, 1953, 1959, 1960, 1962 and 1963. They were more properly known as American Legion University Post #11 D&BC. His first son marched with the CYO Squires, El Toreadors (below and bottom right, 1965) and the Shamrocks. He joined the Bellevue Sentinels around 1968 as their music director and taught music and M&M until the Sentinels merged with the Seattle Shamrocks in 1975.

His second son marched with the CYO Shamrocks, El Toreadors and the Amigos. His daughter marched with the Amigos and Shamrocks. In 1971 she was the Bellevue Sentinels color guard instructor.

That's five drum corps that existed in the far western corner of Seattle. Wow. There might have been others, too. We'll keep searching.

It's also more than a little bit interesting that the local Hispanic-themed corps are all intertwined in this very small geographical area that didn't have a Hispanic demographic to speak of. We have El Toreadors, formed in 1961, splitting into two corps in 1964, with the Amigos being formed from that event. We have Jerry Chambers' (Hurricanes, El Toreadors and Amigos) son joining the

corps lineage makes my head hurt. Or should I say, "Me duele la,"

cabeza"?

long live drum corps!
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Bellevue Sentinels (below, 1973) as their drill and music supervisor in 1968, the Komorek family (El Toreadors management post-Chambers) joining the Sentinels after the Toreadors folded in 1967 and, lastly, we have Duane C. Andrews who had a Hispanic drum corps background in California who, taught music to the Shamrocks and the Toreadors in 1963 and 1964, then co-founding his own Spanish-themed corps, the Bellevue



Looking west from Seattle, to West Seattle. Featuring the West Seattle bridge over the Duwamish river