

A Talk with George Parks

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George Parks marched with Buccaneers for from 1974 through 1987, serving 13 of those years as drum major. During that time, he won eight DCA drum major awards and his corps won the DCA Championship in 1979 and 1980. He has been the director of the University of Massachusetts Minuteman Marching Band for 29 years. He spoke about teaching drum majors and the drum corps activity at the BOA Symposium on July 1.

I was very fortunate as I was coming up. Besides being part of the drum corps, I marched with the University of Delaware and Northwestern University marching bands, which were traditional. When I went to Massachusetts, they were ready to change. I was able to make the change but understand the past. In the "good old days," it was drum corps or band and never the two shall meet. Drum corps would never wear a costume or use a prop.



George Parks

It was interesting to be with a group that was trying to do it all. Today, there is a melding of the whole thing. It's not just drum corps or band -- it's entertainment and education.

I've taught the Drum Major Academy for three decades or so here at the BOA Symposium. We have 600 drum majors here. I see about 3,000 during the summer. I've taught over 50,000 drum majors since I started. What I teach is multifaceted. We spend a lot of time on conducting patterns and conducting clearly and how to change the patterns according to the musical needs. All 600 kids were videotaped and evaluated by staff members for three days.

The drum majors in many cases become assistants to the band director. We give them specific

techniques about what to look for. I tell them that they're a doctor of marching. They learn to look for body positions and how to correct every angle of positions.

They also have to learn how to lead the band. They spend time on learning how to prepare their heads -- how they serve the band members. They learn how to tell the kids who might not make it through band camp without some assistance so that they can help those kids get out of band what they might not get out of school.

When we're here with these corps, the kids just love the corps and watching how the drum majors of the corps command themselves and get a response the members. Everyone emulates what goes on in drum corps. It's a great example for bands around the country. It was 100-degree weather this week and their work ethic wears off on the BOA campers. The kids need that.

There are so many opportunities to do things that aren't positive, things that weren't so open to us when I was growing up. It's a challenge for kids to find good positive work ethics. There are a lot of kids who won't be able to do sports, which provide the same ethic. But we offer a spot for the kids who won't be in the sports teams. And there is no sports team that works harder than what we've got going on here.