

Hannum honored for 25 years with marching band

By Jill Sarber

Thom Hannum, associate director of the Minuteman Marching Band and percussion instructor, was honored Oct. 15 for his 25 years of commitment to the band and his involvement in improving its nationally recognized percussion program.



More than 200 friends, family, colleagues and alumni greeted Hannum at a dinner celebration held in the Campus Center Auditorium during Homecoming weekend. Speakers included band alumnus Sen. Stan Rosenberg (D-Amherst) and band director George Parks.

"Thom has extraordinary talent to teach people of all different levels, it has been amazing to watch how the drum line has developed," says Parks.

"I was overwhelmed by the magnitude of the whole thing," said Hannum. "It is one thing for one person to stand up and say some complimentary things about you, but when it is four or five people, I was really flattered."

Hannum is regarded as one of the nation's foremost percussion clinicians having presented numerous seminars and workshops throughout the United States, Canada, Europe, and Southeast Asia.

In addition to his role as associate director of the marching band, Hannum is the author of three books, "Fundamental Techniques for Marching Percussion," "Championship Concepts for Marching Percussion" and "Aptitude: A Conversation in Snare Soloing." He is also a product consultant and clinician for the Avedis Zildjian Cymbal Company, Vic Firth Sticks and Mallets, and the Pearl Corporation. Hannum serves on the Musicians Advisory Board for J. D'Addario & Company, Inc. where he is involved in the development and design of drum heads for marching percussion. He is an active member of the Percussive Arts Society and the president of the Massachusetts PAS Chapter. In addition, he was inducted into the Drum Corps International Hall of Fame in 2001.

When Hannum was 10, he began to play the drums with the Brookhaven Crusaders, a "neighborhood corps" in the suburbs of Philadelphia. He continued to play throughout high school and joined the marching band at West Chester University where he was studying history and secondary education. He says he knew he always wanted to become a teacher. However he soon realized that his music was more than a hobby and finished his undergraduate at WCU with a bachelor's degree in music education.

Not long before his graduation in 1980, he received a phone call from Parks, who asked him to become a graduate assistant at UMass. Hannum decided that he "had nothing to lose and everything to gain" and accepted the position. He received his master's degree from UMass in 1984 and was offered a newly created assistant director position with the band.

Since 1980, Hannum has worked to improve the quality of the percussion section of the marching band. He established a week-long band camp program that begins a week before the fall semester begins. He also developed a spring semester class that meets two days a week and recruits local students, helps them develop their skills, and gives them a taste of what to expect if they decide to join the band as incoming freshmen in the fall.

In addition, he raised the standards and expectations of the drumline including longer rehearsals and more outside the classroom practice. He explains that "quality creates demand," which means that students who are new to the program strive to be a part of the excellence of the drumline which inspires them to work harder to meet the program's expectations.

"He brings excellence, enthusiasm, creativity and consistency to everything he does," says Steve Robinson, a marching band alumnus and founding member of the drumline fraternity Phi Beta Delta. "His students refer to him as a mentor, father figure and friend."

Hannum contributes the marching band's success to a number of factors including the donations of state of the art equipment by percussion manufacturers, the time and dedication that his students commit and the rest of the marching band team of instructors which includes Parks and assistant director Michael Klesch. They strive to create excellence by communicating their expectations and demands with the students and also allowing them to assume leadership roles and ownership of their work.

"It's hard," Hannum says. "Excellence doesn't come easily. It hasn't always been great, but it has always been improving. That is what I would term successful."

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