
by Greg Jewell

Great Bend, KS, is a community of 20,000 hard-working, plain-spoken, friendly people. The local economy for many years was dominated by the surrounding oil fields, pumping up the black gold in the middle of waving stocks of wheat.

The wind blows constantly and it seems like the weather is either extremely cold or extremely hot. Great Bend is not a small suburb of a big city. In this area, it is the city!

The resources of this small town were limited to say the least, but the pride and the vigor of the people was not. The best feature of

Rebels

American Legion Nationals in Miami where they surprised everyone and placed eighth. That might have been the unofficial beginning of their climb to national stature in drum corps competition.

If there was a single year that marked a major change in the direction of the corps, however, it was 1969. Some changes were forced and some were designed to spring the corps forward.

The 1968 season, which saw the corps claim a finalist spot at the VFW National Championships in Detroit, also saw a number of veterans age out.

Argonne was now a national player, but would be forced to recruit many new members. Besides bringing in new kids, several veterans of the all-male color guard were trained in the winter to play horns. Bugle instructor Sandra Opie would meet with the members before school,

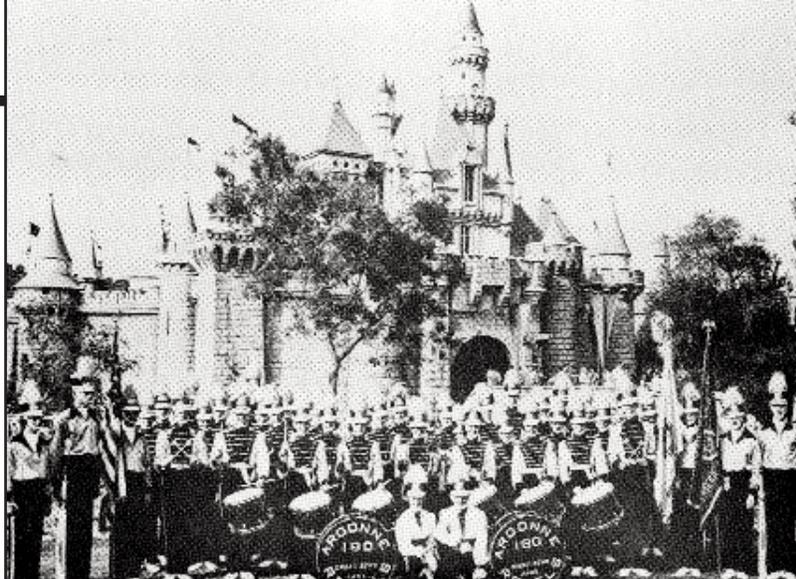
after school and on weekends to teach them fundamentals and turn them in to contributors to what would become a legendary horn line for years to come.

This was a remarkable process, considering the success of the line, but it was necessary considering the small talent pool offered in Great Bend.

The percussion section was thrown into turmoil when the arranger/instructor Larry McCormick of Chicago suddenly left the corps just prior to the start of the season. Lead snare Fred Zutervan literally had to take over the section.

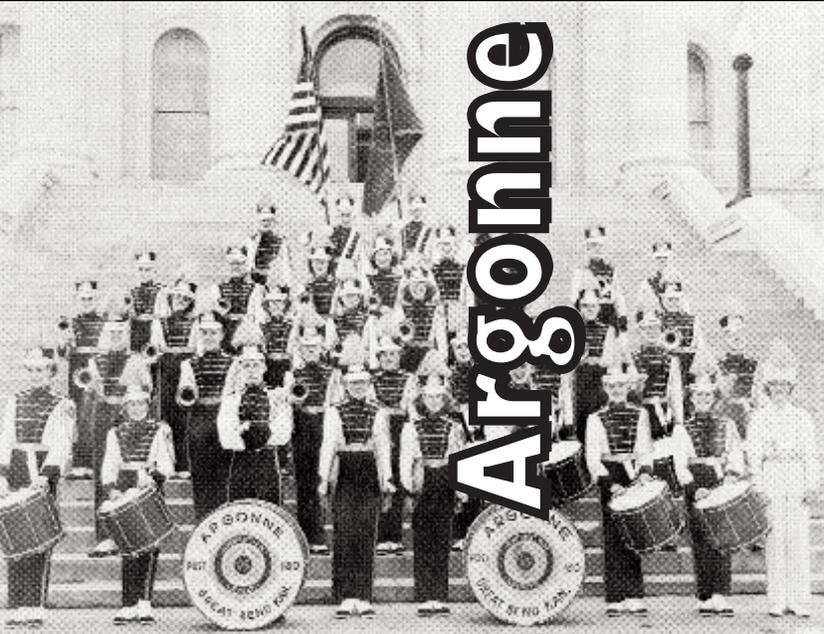
The corps was introducing a new and challenging repertoire that included the very difficult *Barnum & Bailey's Favorite March*. During this period of drum corps, it was common to keep the same show for two or three seasons with minor tweaking here and there.

As the first shows of the Great



The Argonne Rebels, 1957, at Disneyland during a trip to Los Angeles for the American Legion Nationals (photo from the collection of Drum Corps World).

Plains Association were approaching, the corps was working hard, but everyone knew it would be difficult until all the pieces came together.



The Argonne Rebels, 1953 (photo from the collection of Drum Corps World).

the community is the people. Most would offer the shirt off their back and they tend to look out for each other, support and honor those who achieve something special and help those who have yet to achieve something special.

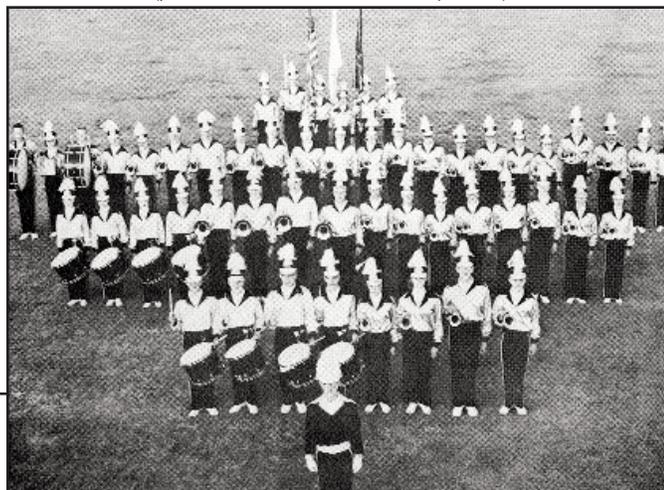
Formed as a parade corps in the 1948, the Argonne Rebels Drum and Bugle Corps began competition in 1955. As a member of the Great Plains Association, the corps had the luxury of being able to compete within the state of Kansas most of the season, cutting costs of travel and generating local interest.

The corps was always aggressive in seeking national competition. In the 1950s, Argonne traveled to distant contests from coast to coast, including American Legion Nationals in 1955 (Miami, 12th), 1956 (Los Angeles, 3rd), 1957 (Atlantic City, NJ, 20th) and 1958 (Chicago, 20th).

After three years when their rivals, the Sky Ryders, represented the state at American Legion Nationals, in 1963, the 60-member corps upset the Hutchinson corps and again won the right to represent the state at the

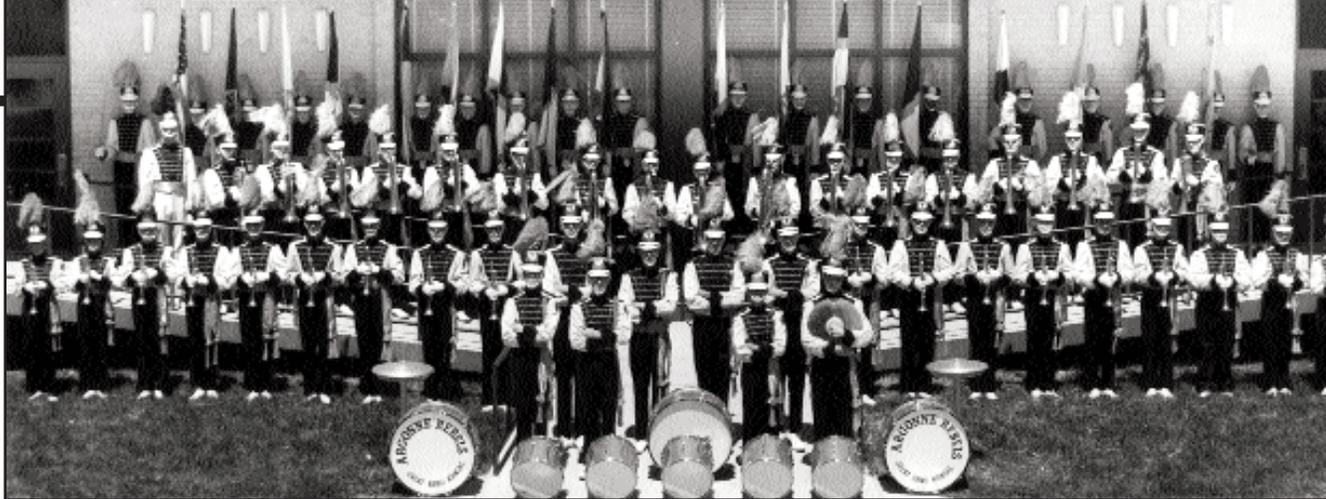


(Above) The Argonne Rebels, 1971 (photo by Art Luebke from the collection of Drum Corps World); (below) the Argonne Rebels, 1957 (photo from the collection of Drum Corps World).



The drill instructors put the final counts on the drill the afternoon of the first show in Derby, KS. Predictably, the first performance was shaky.

Argonne's in-state rival, the Sky Ryders, was fielding perhaps the finest corps in their long history to that point. They won the show and all others in the state, concluding with the Kansas American Legion State Championship. For the defending



The Argonne Rebels, 1965, in front of Great Bend High School (photo by Clay Ward from the collection of Drum Corps World).

champion Argonne Rebels, it was humiliating. But Glenn Opie and his staff kept the members working hard and the members knew they were going to get better and the show had tremendous potential. That was an understatement!

After a whirlwind fund-raising drive to send the corps

on its national tour, the members loaded chartered buses and headed east toward Philadelphia and the VFW Nationals. Prior to that show was the U.S. Open in Marion, OH, and perhaps one of the most significant events in Argonne's history.

The finals performance was magical. Everything clicked for the first time; the execution of this exciting show was there. The crowd responded with standing ovations. The judges responded with great scores and even the perfectionist Sandra Opie was seen smiling on the front sideline. It was Argonne's time to shine on the national stage and all the frustration was wiped away by the end of the performance.



The corps earned a stunning second-place to the eventual champion Kilties. They moved on to Philadelphia and claimed a finalist spot, but more importantly, the corps matured, met all the challenges and would go on to be a powerhouse group for the next several years.

The early 1970s brought the Argonne Rebels unprecedented success. Among the accomplishments were American Legion National Championships in 1971, 1972 and 1973, and top-six finishes at the VFW Nationals in 1971 and 1972.

As a charter member of the newly-formed Drum Corps International, Argonne claimed top-12 status in 1972 and 1973. All of these competitive accomplishments were achieved by fielding an incredible horn line. Some have called it the best ever in the activity.

Led by instructor Sandra Opie, she, along with Brian Pennington,

(Inset) The Argonne Rebels, 1968, VFW Nationals, Detroit, MI (photo by Moe Knox); (above) 1967 (photo Clay Ward, photos from the collection of Drum Corps World).



The Argonne Rebels, 1972, at the DCI Championships in Whitewater, WI (photo by Jane Boulen from the collection of Drum Corps World).

worked countless hours in the off season to teach mainly local kids great fundamentals and a true appreciation for great music.

The charts were arranged by some of the nation's best, including Truman Crawford and later Doug Denison. They were some of the most difficult to be played by a drum corps during this period.

The 1971 championship show included *Barnum & Bailey's Favorite*, selections from "Jesus Christ Superstar," *Stars and Stripes Forever* and *Shenendoah*. The corps was ahead of its time with the "Superstar" medley. To this time, the usual drum corps show

consisted of several short tunes without any particular theme.

In 1971, Argonne's horn line achieved perfection by receiving a 5.0 score for content analysis, an honor shared by only one other corps in history, the Madison Scouts.

The Great Bend corps had less success with the other sections. For most of the history, it featured an all-male color guard. In 1975, girls were introduced into the line. Also at this time, drum corps was changing to a less military style.

In 1976, the traditional cadet jacket was changed and the shakos were traded in for a

white Aussie hat. Some of the management staff looked back on the uniform decision with regret, but it was thought at the time that the new style would give the organization a more creative freedom in the changing era of drum corps.

Mitch Markovich was the dominate figure with Argonne's percussion in the latter years of the corps. He and his wife, Carla, started teaching many of the future members while they were in grade school.

Considering the limited talent pool in the small community, this was an important factor in fielding a competitive unit. While working with the corps, Markovich reintroduced the matched grip style, an innovation that was adopted by a number of other corps.

At the conclusion of the 1973 season, the Opies,

announced they would retire. Glenn, it seemed, had always been with the corps, and Sandra joined the staff in 1960. No one could argue that they didn't deserve to step aside and spend time with their two young boys, Harlan and Robin, who had grown up on the buses and on the practice field sidelines.

But the organization was in shock and, as the torch was passed, the transition was difficult. It didn't help that the board of directors hired a local school teacher to take over who had absolutely no corps experience. The 1974 corps came out much smaller and the tour was a challenge.

In 1975, a staff of alumni was hired and the corps started to make progress back to respectability. Argonne regained its state American Legion Championship over the Sky Ryders and, in 1976, fielded a full corps again. But the glory days had certainly come to an end. The Sky Ryders were starting to claim their mark on the national scene and, in fact, several Argonne members went to march with the Hutchinson corps only 45 miles away.

Gene Specht served as corps director from 1975 to 1978 and Greg Jewell served as a tour director during this period.

In 1978, an alumnus named Jerry Becker took the reigns. Realizing it was necessary to restructure the corps on a smaller scale, more focus was given to competitive color guard and smaller tours.

It is always the competitive achievements that get documented and celebrated, but



The Argonne Rebels, 1973 (photo by Jane Boulen from the collection of Drum Corps World).

there is not a corps that could travel one mile without the background support of a lot of dedicated people.

It would be impossible to mention all those that should be recognized in the success of the Argonne Rebels, but the unique fund-raising challenges this corps faced should be shared.

One thing that hasn't changed a bit is that drum corps is an expensive venture. The value of a dollar is different today than say in 1957, but that dollar was just as difficult to

that they had done their part. Local car dealers donated vehicles to be used by the corps in various ways.

In 1983, Argonne boarded buses one more time and traveled to Miami for the DCI Championships. That, it turns out, was the last appearance of the corps on the field of competition. The little town of Great Bend could no longer fund a nationally competitive corps, but no one could ever say that they hadn't done their part.

Although, there is still an Argonne Bingo

Hall on Main Street that supports local dance troupes, most who had been a part of something very special have moved on.

Glenn Opie dominated the history of the corps. He still runs his law firm in town and is still donating his time to the community, having served on the city council and local school board. In 2003, this pioneer of DCI was inducted into their Hall of Fame.

Sandra Opie, as humble as ever, has been a member of the DCI Hall of Fame since 1995. She served several years as a DCI judge, but has never taught another horn line since leaving Argonne in 1973. She is now an interior decorator.

The Argonne Rebels, like many other drum corps, touched a lot of lives in many ways. Those, who were fortunate to participate and wear the uniform are still benefiting from the experience whether they realize it or not. "Qui Vincet Debet Pugnare" -- "He Who Would Conquer Must Fight."

The drum corps life of Greg Jewell started when a buddy talked him into joining the color guard of the Argonne Rebels. Previous to that, he had not even seen a drum corps, nor had he



been a member of a band. That was in 1968.

Since then, he has remained in the activity in some way or the another.

After marching for three seasons in Argonne, he joined the U.S. Navy and served four years, including a tour of duty in Vietnam. When he was in the United States, he spent time in Long Beach, CA, where he

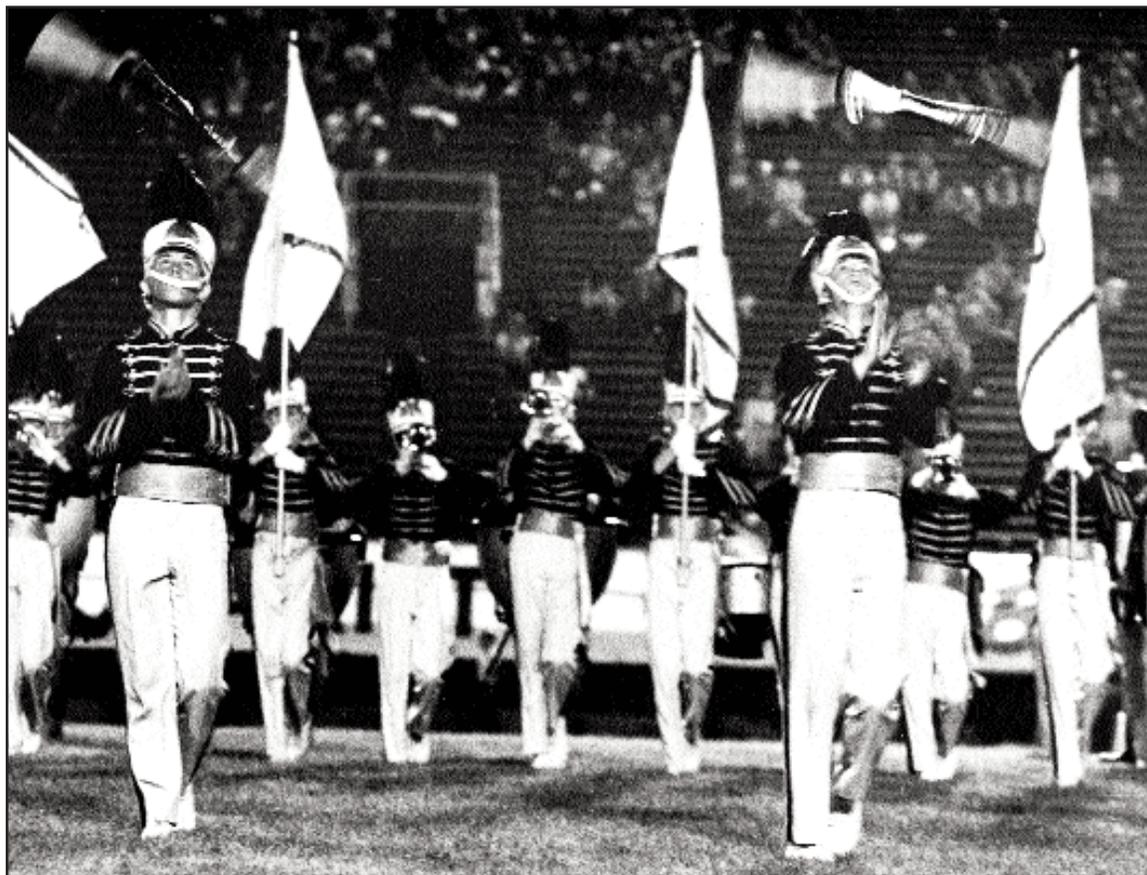
volunteered and made road trips with the Anaheim Kingsmen and the Lynwood Diplomats.

After discharge from the Navy in 1974, he enrolled at the University of Kansas, but the board of directors of the Argonne Rebels asked him to serve as the interim director. He put together a staff as well as represented the corps at DCI meetings. He stayed on as assistant director after hiring Gene Specht to be executive director, resigning after the 1977 season to move to Seattle, WA.

While living in Seattle, Jewell joined the staff of the Seattle Imperials as the assistant director and he served the corps for two years.

Today, he lives in Mission, KS, and has been on the sales force of the Dynamic Fastener Service for more than 20 years. He is single and has interest in college athletics and travel. He has been a member of the Drum Corps World staff since 1971.

His brother Mike was a member of the snare line of the Argonne Rebels from 1971 to 1976.



(Above) The Argonne Rebels, 1972, at the DCI Championships in Whitewater, WI (photo by Jane Boulen from the collection of Drum Corps World); (right) the Argonne Rebels, 1981 (photo from the collection of Drum Corps World).

come by as it is today. Having said that, however, there are a lot of differences.

In such a small community, the resources are very limited. But a majority of the community pitched in, if not with money, with hours of donated time. People who didn't even have kids in the corps volunteered their help. On more than one occasion, when the corps was still short of their fund-raising goal, the local phone book was torn up and pages were given to each booster. Their assignment was to call the names on their page and ask for a donation to send the kids to the national championship contest.

Local businesses took pride in displaying a sticker on their front door with the corps' logo to show

