

Chapter 28: 1978 – What Goes Up, Must Come Down

For this Corps, right at the end of last year, things could not have looked better. If nothing had changed, they could have carried on where they had left off, probably surpassing the accomplishments of last year. If nothing had changed, that is.

The biggest change, and the one that counted most, was the loss of half of the marching members of the Corps. This sort of thing happens, sooner or later, to many Corps. If a well-trained feeder unit can be used to fill the gap, the effects can be alleviated somewhat. If no such organization exists, then there can be problems. This was the case now.



1978: Seneca Optimists

For most of their existence, the Toronto Optimists had maintained such a group, and it had often proven its worth. Here, no one had thought to, or bothered to, start and maintain a feeder Corps. The Optimists and Seneca Corps had both had feeder Corps, but they had been allowed to lapse when the merger took place. (Some still called it a takeover.)

Now, this situation was to lead to one of the most unusual situations ever seen, anywhere, in Canadian Drum Corps. The need finally being noted, a Parade Corps was started at Seneca College, for boys and girls 9-14. They would practice every Sunday from 10:00 – 1:00, at the College sports centre. They would be called the “Seneca Optimists Cadets”, a division of the “Seneca Optimists Drum and Bugle Corps”. Mr. John O’Leary would be the director. This was the right way to go, but would be too little too late to be of much use to the Junior “A” Corps. What was done to help resolve this situation we shall cover when, in time, it happened.



1978: Mike Grimes with friends

Meanwhile, the Corps kept on going. The new director, to replace the retired Al Tierney, was Gord O’Halloran. He went back in Drum Corps to 1956, with the Danforth Crusaders. Later, he played and marched with the Toronto Optimists, Canadian Commanders, was a drum major, drummer, instructor, and all around Drum Corps person. Probably the only things he had not done were play a bugle and be a director. Now he was a director!

Money was a big problem this year and Gord had a personal one-on-one with every member to encourage regular payment of dues. These were now necessary. There was even a scheme floated for each member of the staff to donate a thousand dollars to the Corps. This did not find enough favour to become reality.

In October 1977, a Drum Corps Rules Congress took place, accommodating over 800 participants. Representatives from Canada were:

- Seneca Optimists. Al Tierney
- Oakland Crusaders. Bob Duggan
- O.D.C.A. Jim Towie
- C.D.C.A. Wayne Elliot
- Quebec Jr. "A" Circuit. . . . Maurice Corey

The weekend of January 20th, 1978, saw Symposium 6, the showcase of the C.D.C.A. and O.D.C.A., held at the Sheraton Centre Hotel.

Mr. Evert Botterweg gave a presentation on inventory control and purchasing. He stressed the problems that Canadian Corps had with customs. He was the one to listen to, as he knew exactly how to handle this. He passed his knowledge along to his successors, and, when his instructions were followed, there were never any problems.

Al Tierney spoke on "Corps conduct and pride", an important topic, what with all the trips to different places. He also presented the association awards for this year. This year's "Award of Merit" went, deservedly, to Dick Brown, now the Director of Hyliters Drum Corps.

Gary Czapinski and Ralph Pace (27th Lancers) conducted the M&M clinic. Colour Guards by Len Knuszecki, Marie Grana, and Stan Knoub.

Twelve people conducted the management seminar, among them Don Pesceone, Jack Roberts, Al Tierney, Bob Duggan, John Jones, Jacqui Kennedy and Evert Botterweg. There was more – a mini-corps.

Reports from across town said that the Oakland Crusaders were stepping up rehearsals to one night a week, plus long sessions on the weekend. Getting 90 members out, and expecting 125 by spring, they had experienced a very small turnover of personnel. It seemed they were on the road to recovery.



1978: Seneca Optimists Parachute

Seneca Optimists were undergoing the opposite, having lost half of their people. Some of these were instructors. Sam Kays and Doug Bass, percussion, were now with the Oakland Crusaders.

In a tribute to the past, ex-Optimists George Wright and Bob Trimble started a Colour Guard. It was formed of old Toronto Optimist

members, and had appeared in Christmas parades. Joining the Canadian Colour Guard circuit and the International Colour Guard circuit, they planned to compete and were looking for members.

From February 20th through April 10th, eight half-hour TV specials ran on cable TV. April 3rd saw the Seneca Optimist 1977 field show screened. Three C.J.A. judges, Al Anderson on drums, Ted Keys on bugles, and Greg Oxenham on drill, discussed the Seneca performance for the enlightenment of the viewers.

The Seneca Optimists held a dance on March 25th. Regardless of the loss of so many members, things were carrying on. The Corps was booked into a lot of contests, including all the D.C.I. ones that they had entered in the last two years. Somebody must have known something. Somebody did, though how far ahead of subsequent events is anybody's guess. No matter, it was to lead to one of the most unusual arrangements ever seen in Drum Corps, even by today's standards. It all took place, on the surface, in May of 1978, though it must have been thought of long before.

It was all made possible by the fact that the Peterborough Krescendos had decided to go inactive for a year. They were a fine Corps, and its members were proud of it, its people, its history and traditions. They had marched and suffered side by side through good and bad and were a close knit family. They had worked their way up and eventually became Junior "A". Maybe hastily, as this was a tough division. Finally reverting to Junior "B", they had decided, this year, to stand down. Possibly reorganize, revamp, re-orient and take another run at things at another time.

Peter Byrne, Bugle Instructor of the Seneca Optimists, approached Gerry Hemsley, Director of the Krescendos, about a deal. The Seneca Optimists needed people this year, not only to compete but also to get on the field. What was proposed was a temporary amalgamation of the two Corps for the rest of the 1978 season only.

A meeting was held at a Holiday Inn, attended by the entire executive of the Krescendos and representatives of the Seneca Optimists. Due to this, the people in the Peterborough Corps knew that something was up, because this was a rare occurrence. Between these two factions, bolstered by the instructors from both Corps, a total of 13 hours of meetings took place. As a result of this a formal agreement was signed, on a Saturday night. It stipulated that final acceptance rested on at least 25 of the members of the Krescendos agreeing to it.



1977: Peterborough Krescendos

Mr. Hemsley, the Director, presented the proposal to his group the following day, Sunday. He explained that they would have to adjust their loyalties for the next three and a half months. After that, they would again become the "Krescendos".

Many of the Krescendos saw an opportunity to belong to a D.C.I. Corps, if only for a short period. Indeed, at this time, Seneca Optimists were the only D.C.I. Corps in Canada. They realized that there would probably never be another opportunity like this. Many of them hungered for the opportunity. Some of them had long before this. It meant much more travel and exposure to big time Drum Corps competition. As a result, at least forty members approved of this realignment, far more than stated in the agreement.

So, with the stroke of a pen, the Peterborough Krescendos were now part of a D.C.I. Corps. For most of them, though big adjustments were involved, it was to be a heady experience. As a premonition of this, many of them wondered what the people from Toronto would be like. As it turned out, they were no different from anybody else. Maybe just a bit more “Corps”.

It was planned that the official “lend-lease” get underway at Camp ‘78 to be held in Minden, Ontario, Camp Kilcoo.

The Seneca Optimists would arrive there, with the “inactive” Peterborough Krescendos arriving the next morning. The camp was a nice place, with a large mess hall adjacent to a lake. Other visitors, of course, were mosquitoes and blackflies.

After breakfast, the Seneca Corps went to the practice field, and lo and behold, the Krescendos were already there. A lot of them, lined up and waiting! When the latecomers joined them, the Seneca Optimists, as they all now were, looked huge.



1978: Seneca Optimists in Simcoe

This was not haphazard. All had been planned at a staff meeting in Peterborough, earlier. Not much was left to chance. The two Corps had now met each other. After this, the executive, instructors, and junior executive of both Corps were introduced. Representatives of each branch made a speech and even champagne was served. Finally, there was a toast to “The New Seneca Optimists”, appropriate, no matter how temporary.

The rest of the long weekend was devoted to practice. There was much to be done. First of all, the new people had to learn the entire Seneca drill and music, from top to bottom. Learning the drill was hampered by rainfall, so the time was spent learning and polishing the music.

A lot was done that weekend, with the Peterborough people picking up the new stuff and fitting in very rapidly. The size of the Corps was very impressive.

The following Thursday, the Krescendos people had another meeting, mainly to see what the reaction of their members was to the whole thing. There were a few bitches, but it was noted how small the problems were. Therefore, it was decided that it would work, and it went ahead as originally planned.

It was May 1978 when all this took place. Had it been any later; it would have been impractical, even impossible. The contest season was very close already. Now, a great part of the Corps had to learn and perform the show, and then fit it in with those who already knew it. In double quick time. That it was done, and done quite well, maybe as well as could be expected, was a tribute to both Corps, especially the newcomers. The American Corps had all gotten stronger over the winter, and the cross-town rivals, Oakland Crusaders, had not experienced any big changes. Because of the late date of all this, there would be some unusual, but not entirely unexpected, results.

One result, off the field, was that a lot of bussing took place. People from Peterborough had to be bussed to Toronto for shows, departures, and, mostly, rehearsals. It is evident that such an arrangement could not have worked without the utmost co-operation from both sides. This attitude had been fostered at the camp, with a sign in the mess hall that proclaimed: ***“Seneca Optimists and Krescendos equals Super Corps”***

In size, yes. Other directions would have to wait awhile. Also, a T.A.S. night was had, hoping to induce a unified spirit, although tradition and allegiance, strictly speaking, were now somewhat diluted. However, this was not apparent. What helped, though, was the almost universal desire of Corps-oriented people to march and play. It was as competitive as Bay Street, as compulsive as Saturday Night Fever.

One extreme example of this was Allan Plumb. For him, there was only one Corps, the Seneca Optimists. He had paid his own way here, sacrificing a chance of a summer job, to march with “his” Corps. Where was he from? Oh! Only Portland, Oregon, U.S.A.

Now, with all the amalgamating, predicting, compromising, and whatever else took place, over, it was time for competition. Time to see where all this would lead. There would be surprises. Not all of them were concerning the Seneca Optimists.

June 10th, Kitchener, saw a nice, neat Canadian Corps from Scarborough, Ontario, upset an applectart.

1st Squires.....	56.40
2nd Cardinals.....	55.15
3rd Oakland Crusaders . . .	50.80
4th Ventures.	50.75

The Squires were American. The upset was that the Cardinals defeated the mighty Oakland Crusaders.



1978: Cardinals

Cardinals had been around a long time. Always neat, always trying. Never yet making the “big time”, but always a presence. They were proud of the fact, rightly so, that they had never merged with anybody, retaining their identity. All these mergers could be described as short-term pain for short-term gain. Corps always disappeared during such maneuvers. Of all the Corps that had merged, not very many are around today. Cardinals are. Still not big, or great, or what have you, but still there. It happened, again, the next day and this time with Cardinals eight points up on the Crusaders.

A week later, it was Seneca Optimists turn. By five points. Seneca were over Oakland by one point. Both, supposed big guns, were being humbled by the Cardinals. Seneca at least had the excuse of a late start, and that this contest was in Ajax, hex town for any Optimist Corps. So deeply was this believed that they had pulled out of it in 1977, when of all years, they should have won it. Reality, though, said that this state of affairs could not continue, and gradually, it began to change.

Welland, June 24th

1st	Oakland Crusaders.....	58.4
2nd	Cardinals.....	58.3
3rd	Seneca Optimists.	54.0

A tour was coming up for the Seneca Optimists. Tour One began on July 8th, in Allentown, PA, and was to be instructive. This was D.C.I. East, in with the big boys again. In fact, this tour was to encompass all D.C.I. calibre contests, ending in Toronto.

Myron Melnyck was back with this Corps, which was a good factor. He had left for awhile. Other additions included Bob Steward, formerly of the 27th Lancers.

Seneca, understandably, were off to a slow start but were slowly improving.

After Allentown, where nothing extraordinary took place, the next three days were spent competing in Garfield, N.J., Boston, Mass., and Montreal, Quebec. Verdun, to be exact. This was July 11th, and we can now see how things stood.

In a field of all-American D.C.I. Corps, the Seneca Optimists were eighth, out of eight. A score of 65.20 was a long way from the first place Madison Scouts, with 86.35. Over 21 points! This was a big disappointment, but not totally unexpected. They had not really got going until May.



1978: Seneca Optimists Drums

At Montreal, the crowd loved them, as they always had, and they had put on one of their best shows to-date. The results pointed up the fact that this year would be a race against

time. They were still a fine Corps, but a far cry from last year.

The tour ended at Lamport Stadium, in Toronto. This was the show put on by Seneca College, featuring eight 1977 D.C.I. finalists. Of these, Seneca Optimists were again in eighth position, a little improved score-wise over Quebec. A 66.5, that to some, seemed not quite deserved. Should have been higher. They were three and a half points behind 7th place Garfield who they had hoped to beat.

Three things had conspired to help bring about this situation.

A talented horn line was suffering from a lack of numbers. Despite the amalgamation, there was still a shortage. They would have to rely on age and experience to pull them through. Tenuous factors at this level.

Another problem was percussion. Although, after the union, the section was huge, thirty-seven to be exact, it was not yet clicking or pulling its weight. It was, if only a little, out of its depth.

Thirdly, some of the material was not going over as expected, with the crowd and judges. Although 1978 “Parachute Power” T-shirts were for sale at \$4.00 each, what they represented was not going over. When first introduced last year, it had brought nothing but gasps and applause. Now, it seemed to provoke yawns. Those who knew said that it failed in the “artistic sense”.

Musically, the program, most of which was new and some of which was challenging to the new people, left something to be desired.

The off-the-line was the most pleasant number this Corps played, by a horn line that had blend and balance. Not size, though. “Puttin’ of the Ritz” was, maybe, a bit difficult. It must be realized that, no matter how much the Peterborough people wanted to be D.C.I., not all of them were of that calibre. Some of the Seneca people were not either, so we had a D.C.I. Corps, that entered D.C.I. shows, but without a full complement of D.C.I. calibre people.



1978: Seneca Optimists



1978: Seneca Optimists

The five day tour, though, was considered a success. A great improvement had taken place between the start of it and the finish. It had served to point out where changes might be necessary. As a result of this, the 1976 number “Farandole” was brought back, and inserted in the second half of the show.

After all this negativity, there is a positive side. What the two amalgamated Corps had accomplished in such short a time was nothing short

of amazing. The Krescendo people had made the utmost effort. Without this, coupled with the efforts of the Seneca people, they would not be where they were now. Discipline and appearance were excellent all round. In other words, Class. Despite all the losses, they were still optimistic, if that word still applies. Spirit was still undaunted.

July 15th, Peterborough showed cause for optimism. Cardinals were back in third place, after their brief but commendable fling with victory. Seneca was second, with 70.15 to the Oakland Crusaders 72.75. A difference of 2.60.

A camp intervened and planned changes were to be put into effect. In an attempt to breathe new life into the second half of the show, two numbers would be dropped, so that "Farandole" could be inserted. Camp was in Peterborough, a sign that the operation, successful or not, was working. Bussing and all, which went on, back and forth, for the duration.

The next trial was the Provincial Championship taken back now by the Oakland Crusaders. The scores are revealing.

1st	Oakland Crusaders.....	74.95
2nd	Seneca Optimists.....	73.05
3rd	Cardinals.....	63.45

The Seneca Corps was now only 1.9 behind Oakland, a sign that things were coming together. You would think. The Provincials were on July 22nd, and on July 30th, in Simcoe, Ontario, the Crusaders opened their lead up to six points.

Tour two now approached, which meant meeting, again, top U.S. Corps plus Canadian rivals.

The first stop on this jaunt was Ypsilanti, Michigan, for the D.C.I. North contest. The Corps had to accept the fact that they were not as good as last year. This was apparent to others, as well. It did not, however, stop them from giving their best at each stop. Three potential Canadian champion Corps were following roughly similar schedules, and we shall try to touch on all three, seeing how they compare at the finish. The three were:

- 1st Seneca Optimists
- 2nd Oakland Crusaders
- 3rd Offensive Lions.

Ypsilanti, D.C.I. North was won by Phantom Regiment with 86.65. Far back, in eighth, were Oakland Crusaders with 69.4 Seneca Optimists ended in tenth, with 64.95. A pattern was set that would vary, but not change.

On August 11th, The Offensive Lions were second to Phantom Regiment, but by 14 points. Northstar, of



1978: Corps on Retreat in Simcoe

Kitchener, was back another 11 points from the Quebec Corps. With scores like this, it was improbable that any Canadian Corps would defeat anyone of note, though one or two could possibly make the top twelve.

In Alton, Illinois, on August 9th, Crusaders and Lions met, with Crusaders on top by three. Yet the next day, they were only 1.5 up on the Lions. The Quebec Corps was beginning to move.

Seneca competed in Sioux City, Iowa, on August 10th, coming 5th with a 69.00. They seemed mired in low placing, with low scores. They had pulled out of the U.S. Open in Marion, Ohio, which they had won last year. If it was to avoid defeat, they were suffering it now.



1978: Seneca Optimists

There were other dates before D.C.I. finals, and this was to lead to a serious split. One of these dates was an exhibition. Half the Corps wanted to do it. They were booked in. The other half wanted to skip it in order to practice for the upcoming D.C.I. contest. The Corps Director, Gord O'Halloran, had a dilemma on his hands that should not have arisen. As it turned out, they did the exhibition, as they should, but not without some lingering resentment.

After this had settled down, it was off to Denver, at last, for the 1978 show of the year. An article in the August issue of *Drum Corps World*, noted that ten Corps appeared to have a spot in the finals all but locked up. All others were seen to be struggling. Among these were listed the three Canadian Corps that we have been discussing. They would have to work like crazy to get anywhere this year, but it was a bit late for that now.

The D.C.I. show was August 15th through 18th, and competition for the perceived final two places would be intense.

The preliminaries sifted out those who were fated to go on, and those who were not. Among the latter were our Canadian Corps.

- 17th Oakland Crusaders... 76.70
- 18th Offensive Lions. . . . 76.45
- 23rd Seneca Optimists. . . . 71.40

So, Canada, and Toronto, that used to have two top twelve D.C.I. Corps in existence, now had none. They would now head back to Canada to battle it out for local honours at the Canadian Championship.

This brought out the best in everybody, and along with it some changes.

For the first time in living memory, the Canadian Junior “A” Drum and Bugle Corps Championship was won by a Corps from Quebec. The Offensive Lions, from Jonquiere, Quebec, 500 miles north of Quebec City, were Junior “A” Champions for 1978. They had been creeping up all year, to finally conquer. Being from such a remote area adds lustre to their achievement. They were to be congratulated. Technically, they impressed the most people, with all sections looking and sounding very solid. An impressive, entertaining show capped it off, with a score of 83.3 for first place.



1978: Offensive Lions win Nationals

Second place went to the Oakland Crusaders, not far behind with 82.05. They used much appealing solo work, combined with an overall solid horn and drum line. From their pedestal of last year, the Seneca Optimists dropped to a lowly third, over six points back of the Crusaders. Everybody had tried hard, all year, but it was not enough. The makeshift arrangement of May, with all its fanfare and hopes, was maybe a bit too late. After this, the last important contest of the year, the arrangement was due to expire, as had been agreed upon at the beginning. What happened then, we shall see in the next chapter.

One bit of unsettling news that had not helped Seneca in its drive for another title was the departure of two Drum Instructors. Two young men had come, from California, to instruct the drum line. When things did not quite work out as they expected, they departed, leaving the Corps in the lurch.

The August 1978 issue of Gold Capsule Comments showed who was now in charge.

Editor..... Mike Grimes

Associate Editor. . . Mhairi Cumming

Photographs..... Don Daber, Gareth Skip, Steve Trevor

Layouts & Art..... Don Daber, Paul McCusker

Production..... Mike Grimes, Don Daber

Feature Writers. . . . Mark Lewis, Gareth Skip, Arlene Janicki, Steve Vickers,
Mike Grimes, Mhairi Cumming

The editorial offices for GCC were now at 126 Lakeshore Drive, Toronto.

An excellent yearbook would come out this year. They had always been very good, with pictures of every marching member, scores, rundowns, etc., etc.

Oakland Crusaders, who had a disappointing season in 1977, had not had a great one this year. A mid-season changes of instructors, loss of personnel, and internal problems could account for 1977. What had happened this year?

Seneca's music program this year had made the D.C.I. top twelve hit parade for 1978, if the Corps itself did not.

“Sorcerer and the Latin”

“West Side Story”

“Puttin’ on the Ritz”

“Barn Dance”

“Soulero”

Two numbers in the second half were later removed for the re-insertion of “Farandole” from the 1976 show. This program was popular.

A most interesting article had appeared this year in Drum Corps News Magazine, on June 21st to be exact. It was a brief story, covering the existence of the Toronto Optimists Drum and Bugle Corps from 1958 to 1976. It was generally positive; saying that win, lose, or draw, this Corps always displayed class. This was true. It was promoted from within. It also said it set records that might never be broken. Also true. They haven't yet. Saying it was prominent for 17 years, it omitted to say that it had existed for 18. Ten consecutive titles were cited, when it was eleven. The biggest fallacy was saying that the founders of the Optimists had spent considerable time studying the operation and management of the Chicago Cavaliers. Further to this, it said that the Corps was a carbon copy of the Cavaliers. This last claim was false. Anyone who has read this far knows the true story. Probably, though, many people did think that all this was true, even without articles such as this. I guess it depends who you believe.

Further, the writer said that, along with many others, he considered the 1962 Corps the finest Canadian Corps ever fielded. This is saying something after the rise of De



1978: Seneca Optimists Rifle



1978: Seneca Optimists Horns

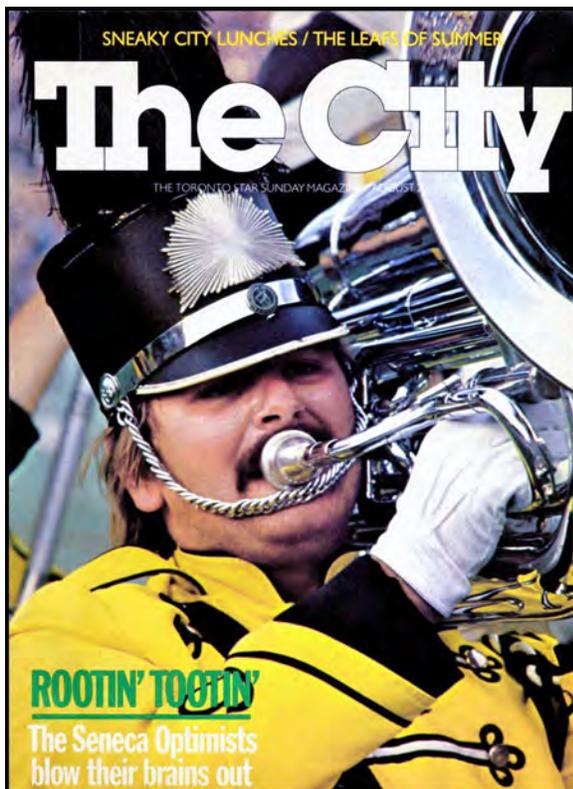
La Salle, Oakland Crusaders, and Seneca Optimists. More. When the Optimists lost the Nationals in 1969, the entire Corps showed class in defeat. They did, according to De La Salle full honours. It also said the average age of the Corps that year was 15. Very young, against older, more experienced Corps. Going on to outline the Corps until its merger in 1976, the article overall was highly complimentary, just some of the facts were a little wrong.

A glaring omission, there are many in this chapter, due to lack of data, is that the Drum Major of the Seneca Optimists this year was Keith Gallagher¹⁸. He had done a fine job during a trying year.

Seneca had a couple of entries in a Drum Corps book of world records, now in print. They have the oldest continuous Drum Corps newsletter, G.C.C. begun in 1960 as Green Capsule Comments. Now Gold Capsule Comments. All told, it had seen 18 years of publication.



1978: Mike Grimes and Keith Gallagher, Seneca Optimists Drum Majors



1978: Seneca Optimists (Cover of City Magazine)

Seneca was the first Canadian Corps to win the Open Class at the U.S. Open. Toronto itself had a mention as the first city to place two Corps in D.C.I. finals in the same year. It only lasted one year.

Late August saw the Seneca Optimists featured on the front cover of the Toronto Star, Sunday magazine. It showed a contra-bass player, playing his horn, in full uniform. The caption read “The Seneca Optimists blow their brains out”. More seriously, it stated that “our crack Drum and Bugle Corps has been waging up and down battle all summer to stay among the top twelve in North America. This was right on, but as the article was likely written sometime before publication, it did not say that it was a battle they lost.

One final cheery note on which to end this chapter is that Bernie Beer was inducted into the D.C.A. Hall of Fame, along with five other notables. D.C.A. is the Association for Senior Corps.

¹⁸. Mike Grimes was the Drum Major while Keith Gallagher was the Assistant Drum Major.



1978: Seneca Optimists

Version