



# World Drum Corps Hall of Fame

**NEWS RELEASE:** for immediate release

August 5, 2014

## **Funeral service for Hall of Fame member**

### **Lennie Piekarski to be held Friday, August 8**

Mass of Christian Burial for World Drum Corps Hall of Fame member Leonard "Lennie" Piekarski, will be held 10 am Friday August 8 at Santa Maria del Popolo Chapel, 116 North Lake Street in Mundelein, Illinois. Interment will follow in St. Adalbert's Cemetery. Visitation will be Thursday from 4-8 pm at the Kristan Funeral Home P.C., 219 West Maple Ave, in Mundelein, located north of Chicago near Waukegan.

He passed away Sunday August 3 at Rainbow Hospice Ark in Park Ridge, Illinois at the age of 88. He was one of the longest serving World Drum Corps Hall of Fame members, being inducted in 1982. He was widely recognized for his contribution to drum and bugle corps activities, particularly with Chicago Cavaliers, for more than 50 years. He was born June 29, 1926 in Milwaukee and adopted into the family of Ben and Betty Piekarski in Chicago.

He is survived by Joan, his wife of 61 years, their five children, Terry (Roger) Krikke, Joe (Helen) Piekarski, Sandy (Brent) Simpson, Carl (Mary) Piekarski, Patti (David) Hehr, eight grandchildren and four great grandchildren. Memorial contributions may be directed to the Special Operations Warrior Foundation at [www.specialops.org](http://www.specialops.org) or the United States Navy Memorial at [shipsstore.navy memorial.org](http://shipsstore.navy memorial.org)

His drum corps career began in 1933 at age 7 as a snare drummer marching with the Palmer Sons of the American Legion (SAL) drum and bugle corps of Chicago. He

eventually marched with four different SAL drum and bugle corps. His longest involvement was seven years with Gladstone SAL. He won the 1938 Illinois individual snare drum championship.

His drum corps involvement was interrupted in 1944 when at age 18 when he joined the United States Navy, serving on a light cruiser in the Pacific Theater for 19 months during World War II. He joined the United States Postal Service in 1952 and worked as a letter carrier for 40 years.

After his naval service, he resumed drumming in SAL competition. In 1947, he was with Logan Square SAL. From 1948 until 1950, he again marched with Gladstone. The corps won the SAL championship in Los Angeles in 1950.

He wrote the drill and played in the snare line with Skokie Indians senior drum and bugle corps from 1952 to 1960, his last year as a marching member. During that time, the Skokie Indians won the American Legion (AL) national title three years in a row: in Miami in 1955; in Los Angeles in 1956; and in Atlantic City in 1957.

He was the long-time drill writer and instructor with Chicago Cavaliers and was widely credited with creating and teaching the marching standards and maneuvering patterns that earned the corps the nickname "Green Machine." During the period he taught drill, the Cavaliers attended 20 national veterans' conventions, winning the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) national junior title in 1957, 1959, 1961, 1962, 1963 and 1967 and the American Legion nationals in 1966 and 1967.

The other instructors during this period were Sal Ferrera on horns and Frank Arsenault on drums, composing a trio widely considered the most successful instructing staff in drum corps history. All are members of the World Drum Corps Hall of Fame. The World Drum Corps Hall of Fame selected the Cavaliers the best junior corps of the decade twice: the 1960s and 2000 – 2009.

He also served as a marching instructor, drill designer and consultant for many other well known corps in the Midwest and as far west as California, including Winfield Scott Rebels senior corps of Maywood, Illinois; Rebels of Argonne, Kansas; Phantom Regiment of Rockford, Illinois; Blue Stars of LaCrosse, Wisconsin; the Kingsmen of Anaheim, California and the Boys of '76 of Racine, Wisconsin.

He was associated with the Central States Judges Association and the Midwest Color Guard Circuit, judging drum corps, color guards and marching bands until the early 1980s.

Seventy years after the first summer he marched, he instructed the Chicago Royal

Airs alumni corps, riding in the bus all the way to Scranton, Pennsylvania for the corps' performance during the Drum Corps Associates (DCA) Alumni Classic concert at Lackawanna County Stadium, one of the events held during the DCA world championship tournament on Labor Day weekend.

The late Vince Bruni of Rochester, New York, who passed away in 2003, founded the World Drum Corps Hall of Fame in 1976. Membership has since grown from six charter members – Vince Bruni, George Bull, Jim Costello, Henry “Lefty” Mayer, Harvey Olderman, Vinnie Ratford – to 472 regular and associate members from the United States and Canada who have contributed to the activity across North America, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, the Middle East, South Africa and Japan.

For more information about the World Drum Corps Hall of Fame, visit the web site at: <http://www.worlddrumcorpshof.org/>

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**NEWS RELEASE:** for immediate release

July 31, 2014

## **Funeral service for Hall of Fame member**

### **Gene Bennett held Friday, August 1**

Funeral service for World Drum Corps Hall of Fame member Eugene F. 'Gene' Bennett is scheduled for 10 am Friday August 1 at Bridge Street AME (African Methodist Episcopal) Church, 277 Stuyvesant Ave, Brooklyn, New York. He passed away Tuesday, July 22 at the age of 74 in New Hyde Park, New York. He was inducted into the Hall of Fame during ceremonies held in Scranton, Pennsylvania in 2002.

Visitations were held on Thursday July 31 from 6 to 9 pm at Crowe's Funeral Homes in Jamaica, New York and from 9 to 10 am on Friday August 1 at Bridge Street AME Church. Interment will be in Pinelawn Memorial Park in Farmingdale, New York.

Founded in 1766 and incorporated in 1818, Bridge Street AME Church has been providing programs to meet the spiritual, intellectual, physical, emotional and environmental needs of people in the church and community for more than 200 years. Through its music ministry, the church provides music programs to develop and enrich the spiritual lives of its congregation.

Gene Bennett was active in the drum and bugle corps community since he first played a drum with the Blue Jacket Guard in 1948. Over the following 30 years, he played snare, tenor and bass drum and marched in the color guard with five different units, including the Washington Carver Gay Blades and the Long Island Sunrisers.

He designed and taught drill to such well-known units as the Long Island Kingsmen, the Sunrisers and the Bushwackers, of Harrison, NJ who he helped move into the top ranks in Drum Corps Associates (DCA) competition when he first worked with the group in 1984 and again in 2005 when Bushwackers climbed back to finish among the top four.

He also served as a marching and manoeuvring and color guard judge throughout the 1970s and 1980s. He created the first all female color guard in DCA. He instructed a number of high school marching bands in various New York communities.

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The World Drum Corps Hall of Fame is a non-profit organization honoring those individuals who have contributed significantly over many years to the development and continuing excellence of drum and bugle corps activity. The organization also seeks to preserve the history of the drum and bugle corps movement in North America by selecting a noteworthy junior and all age (senior) corps of each decade since 1940. Those corps are:

1940s: Holy Name Cadets and Lt. Norman Prince

1950s: St. Vincent’s Cadets and Reilly Raiders

1960s: Chicago Cavaliers and Hawthorne Caballeros

1970s: Santa Clara Vanguard and Hawthorne Caballeros

1980s: Blue Devils and Sunrisers

1990s: Cadets of Bergen County and Empire Statesmen

2000s: Cavaliers of Rosemont and Reading Buccaneers

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### April 29, 2014

The World Drum Corps Hall of Fame announces the Class of 2014

Since 1976 The World Drum Corps Hall of Fame has honored individuals who have contributed significantly to the drum and bugle corps activity. Please welcome and congratulate these newest members who will be inducted on Friday evening August 29th in Rochester, New York.

#### Pete Emmons

It is next to impossible to overstate the influence Pete Emmons has had on the visual aspect of drum corps. Garfield's "Peace Sign", Vanguard's "Bottle Dance", the concept that drill could be asymmetrical, all came from the imagination of Pete. Since 1988 and to this day Pete Emmons has been an important part of the Blue Devil's organization. Pete was previously inducted into the DCI Hall of Fame.

#### Frank Ponzio

When people talk of a soloist who can fill a stadium the name Frank Ponzio will always be prevalent. Frank's career as a soloist spans more than three decades and includes The Sunrisers, Caballeros, Caballero Alumni and the Golden Eagles. His teaching career is equally impressive. Of those who have had the privilege of working with Frank, the phrase 'team player' is common. Frank was previously inducted into the Buglers Hall of Fame.

#### Scott Stewart

For more than three decades the name Scott Stewart was synonymous with the Madison Scouts. He joined The Scouts as a baritone player in 1968 then went on to become a staff member and eventually Corps Director, a position he held for more than twenty years. Under his directorship the Madison Drum Corps Association sponsored three drum and bugle corps and was a beacon for fiscal responsibility. Scott was previously inducted into the DCI Hall of Fame.

#### Mark Thurston

Be it Junior Corps, Senior Corps or Indoor Percussion, Mark Thurston has enjoyed tremendous success. The Crossmen, Spirit of Atlanta, Westshoremens and Buccaneers have all benefited from his teaching and writing skills. In 1999 WGI named Mark as their Director of Percussion, a position he holds today. Mark was previously inducted into the WGI Percussion Hall of Fame.

### Robert Vitti

Spanning more than 30 years Bob Vitti's instructional history has taken him from The Sky Riders of Hutchinson, Kansas to The Skyliners of New York City to the 5 time DCA World Champion Brigadiers of Syracuse, New York. Those that know Bob well speak highly of his ability to infuse excitement and enthusiasm in his teaching both in drum corps and as an educator.

### Robert Zazzara

Certainly an accomplished and highly respected brass arranger and instructor in the drum and bugle corps arena, Bob Zazzara's significant influence has been felt throughout not only drum corps but in education and adjudication. Bob earned his Bachelor's Degree as a trumpet major but then went on to a Master's Degree in vocal music. Bob's talent was and is recognized by virtually every adjudication association from DCA to DCI.

### Christopher Ferguson

Retired Astronaut Christopher Ferguson, who marched in the percussion section of the Philadelphia PAL Cadets in the mid-1970s, will be inducted into the World Drum Corps Hall of Fame in August for Distinguished Professional Achievement, a new membership category.

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### 4/19/2014

Our own John Simpson will be inducted in the DCI (Drum Corps International) Hall of Fame Class of 2014. John is already a member of the World Drum Corps Hall of Fame. For John to be recognized by both organizations is a considerable achievement. Some relevant information from DCI follows:

"Since 1985, the Drum Corps International Hall of Fame has honored individuals who have left their mark on the world of marching music. From instructors to designers to innovators, administrators and others, today's Hall is made up of more than 100 men and women influential in the history of drum and bugle corps.

Each winter, members of the drum corps community participate in a nomination process, informing DCI's Hall of Fame Committee of those whom they feel should be recognized as part of drum corps' legacy. In April, current Hall of Fame members and corps directors participate in an election process to decide who will join the ranks of this prestigious society.

Five individuals have been selected for induction as the DCI Hall of Fame Class of 2014. They will be recognized during the week of the DCI World Championships in Indianapolis this August.

### John Simpson

Brass instructor, Bridgemen, Sky Ryders, Star of Indiana

First and foremost an educator, John Simpson's top priority when teaching a brass section—

whether for the Bridgemen, Sky Ryders, Star of Indiana or others—was on playing with excellent tone quality and intonation.

“His brass sections had an unmistakable vibrancy of tone and always played with good tuning,” said Chris Knighten, a Sky Ryders alum who now serves as director of bands at the University of Arkansas. “The resulting ‘Simpson Sound’ was powerful, full of dynamic extremes and incredibly musical and entertaining.”

“From 1979-1983, John arguably produced some of the best horn lines in DCI, regardless of overall corps placement,” said Santa Clara Vanguard brass arranger JD Shaw who is a former member of the Sky Ryders. “The technical prowess and connection with the audience were second to none.”

Joining the United States Air Force Drum and Bugle Corps in the 1960s and soon after the New York Skyliners, Simpson helped lay the groundwork for developments in bugles that at the time were rudimentary compared to today’s instruments; regulated to single valves that limited the number of notes that could be effectively played.

With DCI Hall of Fame member Robert “Pepe” Nataro, Simpson worked to develop a new “slip-slide” technique for bugle playing that incorporated the use of valve and valve-slide combinations to allow brass musicians to play through more notes on their instruments. As an arranger collaborating with the likes of DCI Hall of Fame member Larry Kerchner, Simpson used those new techniques and note combinations to create harmonies never before heard on the drum corps field.

“John helped fashion arrangements that incorporated key signatures that allowed for more chromaticism, resulting in a much richer harmonic palette than heard from most corps in that era,” Knighten said.”

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#### 4/19/2014

WDCHOF member Norm Peth reports that he’d recently been discharged from the hospital, where he’d received numerous blood transfusions. He was losing blood and the doctors eventually discovered the source of his problem. He’s home again, where he reports that at age 90 he’s still drumming and playing the piano. Norm said he remains quite sad because his wife passed away a year ago.

Cards and letters to his home address:

303 Oak Track Pass  
Ocala, FL 34472

4/13/2014

Former WDCHOF President and founding member, George Bull, was hospitalized on 4/13/14. He has since been moved from the hospital to Nottingham Health Center, Room 207. His appetite has improved slightly and he's able to do limited walking now. Most likely, he'll remain in this rehab center at least 2 weeks. He prefers not receiving phone calls, but get-well wishes can be mailed to his home:

8800 Walther Blvd. #3308  
Baltimore, MD 21234

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