



Robert Briske

For 23 years, one man ran the show – the DCI regional and World Championships shows, that is. For many years, Robert Briske was the one and only contest director of DCI since its inception. He was recruited by the DCI board of directors to run the first World Championship in Whitewater, Wisconsin, and called the shots from that point forward. He was firm in his commitment to the job and let nothing, including rain, interfere with his mission to run a show and run it well. A product of drum corps, Briske had an extensive background in the activity. He marched in a local Chicago corps and marched with the three-time American Legion National Senior Champion Skokie Indians. Before his involvement with DCI, he was contest director of the Illinois Drum Corps Association.

Remembering the man who taught DCI to run on time

By Michael Boo, for DCI.org.

Former Drum Corps International contest director Bob Briske passed away July 28 at the age of 87. Briske served in the position from DCI's inception in 1972 through 1994 and was inducted into the DCI Hall of Fame in 1988.

As contest director, Briske methodically ran each of the big shows during DCI's developing years. He could be gruff and focused on the field as well as behind it, but a teddy bear, full of laughter, outside of the stadium. His word was the law and it didn't matter to him to whom he was talking. He was well respected for playing no favorites and for making everything operate smoothly.

In a feature in the "DCI Contest Guild" newspaper in the fall of 1978, Briske's responsibilities were explained as including coordinating corps housing, setting up practice fields, handling bus breakdown emergencies, keeping corps directors happy, and getting corps on and off the field on schedule. In doing so he was described as playing the role of "a priest, a mother, a policeman, a psychiatrist and sometimes a security blanket."

In that article, Briske was quoted as saying, "The problems will happen, but they can always be resolved by taking them one by one." He added, "The solutions to most problems are solved by the other corps in the show. I've had to call on many corps to change positions in the order of appearance because of an emergency situation. The corps are always super cooperative."

Briske started his drum corps career as a member of the Sheffield Boys Club Drum and Bugle Corps in Chicago, where he met his wife Joan, who preceded him in death. Later, he marched in the Logan Square Drum and Bugle Corps in Chicago and after aging out, joined the three-time National Championship Skokie Indians Senior Drum and Bugle Corps. He also managed the Skokie Indians and the Norwood Park Imperials (junior corps), as well as the Mel Tierney American Legion Post Drum and Bugle Corps (which eventually became the Des Plaines Vanguard). On top of that, he ran the Illinois Drum Corps Association, which in the pre-DCI years ran about two-dozen shows in Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin.

When DCI was formed in 1972, Briske was recruited to direct the first championship event, held in Whitewater, Wisconsin. He was responsible for making all arrangements for both the stadium and corps housing, setting up practice fields, arranging meals, and coordinating the field show. When a huge housing problem developed just prior to the 1975 DCI World Championships in Philadelphia, he called the mayor of the city and the University of Pennsylvania athletic directors and succeeded in getting the Philadelphia Civic Center, the city library, and a number of gymnasiums open for the corps.

Briske stated that he did everything he could think of doing prior to a contest so the directors of each corps only had to worry about their own corps' competition. He said, "It is especially gratifying when the director of a corps writes me after the competition season is over to say 'thanks.'" But his favorite part of the job was when he could "sneak up in the stands and watch thousands of people enjoying the show."

DCI television host and Hall of Fame member Steve Rondinaro says, "The first time I met Bob Briske as a young corps manager, I was scared to death of him. He expected things done a certain way from the bus to the stadium sideline. I didn't want to find out what would happen if we did it wrong. Over the years I would come to delight in my dealings with Bob and his crew. They were great folks who kept the show going.

"I gained an entirely new appreciation of Bob's demands for precision upon stepping into that PBS broadcast booth in 1979. Any burps or delays in the contest could create havoc in a live five-hour telecast. We had amazingly few problems over the years. Bob formed the template that guides us today."

DCI announcer and Hall of Fame member Brandt Crocker remembers, "44 years ago I had never heard of this man, but he took a chance on a 'cowboy from Wyoming.' While sometimes difficult to work for, we did become fast friends and I will miss knowing he is not among us any

longer. Actually I've missed him ever since he retired from drum corps.”

“He was the obvious choice for the job of DCI contest director and was the only one considered for the position,” Hall of Fame member Gene Monterastelli said. “He said what he meant and he meant what he said. There was no need to read between the lines with Bob Briske. It was great having him in charge of the contest as the corps could just focus on their performance and didn’t have to worry about any external forces.”

DCI Hall of Fame member Mary Pesceone says, “Bob was such an integral part of making all the kids comfortable to take the field. He always stressed how important it was to make it all work on the field for the kids. It is now complete; they can now have a big show up there.”

Briske once stated, “I have made friends all over the country and I know I’ll never lose them.” Indeed, countless drum corps fans have lost a true friend.

A memorial service for Briske will be held on Saturday, August 27 at 11:00 a.m. CT at the Edison Park Lutheran Church, 6626 N. Oliphant Ave., Chicago.