



Robert Currie

Robert Currie's experience with drum corps consisted of many variables. He had a part in every aspect of the movement from his days of marching and instructing to the years he spent developing a judging system that was the beginning of drum corps as we know it today. He is best known for his leadership and guidance in making the Central States Judging Association the forerunner of modern judging.

He began his drum corps career marching with a Villa Park, Illinois, drum corps and went on to march and instruct in various corps throughout the Chicago region. After instructing, he then went into judging in his area of expertise - percussion. "You didn't know if you had a good line or a bad line until Currie judged it," Dave Richards, a fellow judge, said.

In the 1950s Currie was involved in judging with the All-American Judges Association, which was divided into regional groups. Currie, Richards, Rick Maass and Earl Joyce all worked within the Midwest region.

The Eastern region, at the time, was very progressive in the percussion area and "would beat the pants off us every time we would meet," Currie recalled.

Tired of always losing to the East, Currie felt that something must be

done. In his instructing and judging, he placed more emphasis on precision and what the members were playing rather than the mechanics of a drum line. He went beyond judging whether drumsticks were positioned at the right intervals or if all the drums were at the right angles.

“He was one of the first persons that recognized that no criteria was established in relation to the proficiency of the person’s playing,” Earl Joyce said.

After several years with the All-American Association, Currie and others felt it was time to move on and develop a better system of judging and scoring.

“We thought the criteria at the time was substandard because the judging did not make the kids toe the line and find a way to push themselves in the general direction of perfection and innovativeness,” Currie explained. Several people on the board of the All-American Association agreed with him and voiced their ideas, however, the association did not move on the issues.

Because of that, Currie and others simply undertook the task of starting their own judging organization that would create more challenges and growth for the activity.

Two years after its inception in 1959, Currie became the administrator of the Central States judging Association. In the developmental years, he led the organization that made drastic changes in the judging field.

They began the policy of mandatory judge testing to be certain a person was qualified. Rick Maass, one of the seven men who founded CSJA, recalled that before the organization began strict testing, anyone who knew what a line or a squad was could qualify as a judge. To maintain a high standard, CSJA sponsored clinics on judging and the participants had to learn all three captions followed by a full day of testing.

CSJA also led the way in helping the corps understand why they received the scores they did. After-contest critiques were established directly following every show to discuss with the instructors why the judges gave them their respective scores and how they could improve them.

CSJA was starting to have a heavy influence on the programs the corps were designing because of the input they received from the critiques.

“Someone from one of the Eastern corps once said that every time they came to the Midwest and were judged by CSJA, every contest became a seminar,” Maass recalled. “Which made us feel like we had accomplished something. We wanted them to understand and to grow.”

After the program showed success, other state and regional judging associations started to emulate the system. At the same time, the judges from CSJA were in demand across the nation and were judging contests in the East and West as well as in the Midwest. Currie also assigned judges to the national panel in addition to the local shows.

Under Currie's leadership, CSJA also pushed for a unified rules and regulations manual which came to be known as the “blue book.” The American Legion held a rules and regulations congress similar to what DCI has now.

“Currie’s main concern at these meetings was what he wanted done and what he believed in but it wasn’t only for the good of one organization in particular. It was for the good of the whole activity,” Joyce said.

Currie became one of the principal authors of the Legion “blue book” which originated from the Legion congress.

“Before the blue book was developed, there wasn’t any literature or any written definition that could tell you what a column or a file or even

what a turn was,” Joyce explained.

The book defined terms and gave judges an opportunity to go to one source. Everyone would then know and understand the same definition which standardized judging. The blue book was one of the foundations in helping to form DCI.

The impact of CSJA and what they had accomplished led corps to realize that they had tremendous potential for growth. The Western and Midwestern corps formed the Combine to break away from the American Legion and VFW. The Eastern regional corps formed the United Organization of Junior Corps. However, at the American Legion Congress in Indianapolis, the historic session took place from which Drum Corps International was formed.

“As a result of Currie's organizational strengths and the accomplishments of CSIA, an evolution took place and DCI became what it is today,” Don Pesceone, executive director of DCI, said.

As DCI became established, Currie continued his involvement in the activity once again judging percussion. He went on to judge several world championship contests until his retirement in 1976.

It is because of the foresight and leadership of Currie that drum and bugle corps is the activity it is today. His courage of his convictions and efforts were what was honored in December 1987 when he was inducted into the DCI Hall of Fame – an award that the DCI board of directors, member corps and Hall of Fame members felt he truly and most definitely deserved.

Robert Currie’s drum corps career was epitomized by his push for growth and challenges for the drum corps activity. Because of those beliefs and his efforts, drum corps will follow his lead and continue to grow and prosper.