
**by Ron Bonadonna
with assistance from
John "Duke" Terreri**

One of the oldest church-sponsored drum corps in the East was the St. Lucy's Cadets from Newark, NJ. Organized in 1924 as a fife, drum and bugle corps, St. Lucy's appeared in numerous parades and concerts, both locally and nationally, and won several national titles in standstill competitions.

However, their major function throughout the years was to accompany the annual procession of parishioners each October who devotedly followed the statue of their beloved St. Gerard Maiella, the Patron Saint of Mothers who hailed from Caposele near Naples, the origin of many of the Italian parishioners who emigrated to Newark's First Ward at the start of the 20th century.

Following World War II, several of the corps members became

St. Lucy's Cadets



St. Lucy's Cadets, 1958 (photo by Walter Ermel from the collection of Ron Da Silva).

actively involved in competitive senior and junior corps in the area. They would be instrumental in changing the concert corps into St. Lucy's Cadets.

Among the new corps' organizers was Cosmo E. Alagna, the gravelly voiced drum major of the fife corps, who would serve as director from 1955 until 1965. Thomas Campione, affectionately known as "Tom McAnn," became business manager (as well as drill instructor in 1960-1961). And finally, Alfred "Duke" Terreri, a talented rudimental and big band drummer -- who also marched with the Gabarina Skyliners and taught St. Joseph's Cadets from Newark -- instructed St. Lucy's drum line through 1961.

The pastor of St. Lucy's, Father Gaetano Ruggiero, was the corps' first moderator. He soon turned over the task to his new assistant, Father Joseph Granato, who guided the corps until July 1961, when Father Joseph Nativo took over and led St. Lucy's to national prominence through the 1960s.

Both Granato and Nativo remain to this

day at St. Lucy's Parish. Through 1965, St. Lucy's Cadets marched in the Penn-Jersey Association, competing with all of the major New Jersey drum corps of the day, including

St. Vincent's Cadets from Bayonne, Holy Name Cadets from Garfield and their eventual cross-town rivals, the Blessed Sacrament Golden Knights.

In the late 1950s, the corps had little success against these competitors. They competed in their first American Legion Nationals in Miami, FL, in October 1960, finishing seventh, well behind the winning Garfield Cadets.

But in 1962, St. Lucy's began a rapid rise to the top of New Jersey drum corps, winning three association championships (1963-1965) and appearing in their second American Legion Nationals with a third-place finish in 1963, again in Miami.

Instructors in the 1950s included George Rodriguez and Joe Genero on horns and Ralph Silverbrand on drill. Beginning in 1962, Jimmy D'Amico taught and wrote for the horn line for the next three years, while Danny Raymond taught drums until 1967.

Complementing their youthful enthusiasm were three veteran drill instructors: Frank Kubinak (1962), Hugo Evarelli (1963) and Michael "Mickey" Petrone, who would teach and direct the corps from 1964 until

their last year, 1969.

One of the two best years for the corps was 1964. At their first contest, May 25 in Garfield, St. Lucy's took first place and notched their first wins over both Garfield and Blessed Sacrament.

Nativo and many of the corps alumni often pointed to that day as perhaps St. Lucy's greatest

accomplishment; a win over Blessed Sacrament and Garfield was a victory over the best that drum corps had to offer in that era.

During a 10-show winning streak, St. Lucy's won the VFW New Jersey State title and posted their first win over the powerful St. Kevin's Emerald Knights from Boston.

While their first



St. Lucy's Cadets, 1964 (photo by Moe Knox from the collection of Drum Corps World).

appearance at a VFW Nationals (1964 in Cleveland) was a disappointing eighth (they were sixth in the prelims, ahead of the Chicago Cavaliers), they held on strong in local competitions and won their second association championship and their first American Legion state title.

The corps also made its first appearance at the National Dream contest and the World Open. Music arrangers in 1963-1964 were Hy Dreitzer and Don Angelica.

In 1965, St. Lucy's saw a number of major changes. New military-style uniforms in red, white and blue were purchased (the corps actually appeared in tuxedos at the annual "Evening With the Corps" at Carnegie Hall and at their first field show the next day -- the new uniforms had not yet arrived) and the corps switched to an all-male guard.

Joe Policastro became color guard instructor and Bob Bunce did a number of music arrangements. While not as successful as the previous year, St. Lucy's remained near the top of the Eastern corps and was poised for bigger accomplishments over the next three seasons.

Continuous staff changes in an effort to find the right combination to bring the corps to a national championship resulted in the Sunrisers' John Sasso as new horn instructor and arranger in 1966. Jim Russo marched his first season as drum major.

For most of the year, St. Lucy's was in close competition for first place in the area with Blessed Sacrament. They finished seventh at the VFW Nationals in Jersey City, with victories over the Chicago Royal Airs and Racine Kilties, and later, the Chicago Vanguard.

At the Dream contest, they were

St. Lucy's Cadets photo collage, 1968 (by Moe Knox from the collection of Drum Corps World).



one-thirtieth of a point behind the VFW Champion Casper Troopers and within a point of the American Legion Champion Chicago Cavaliers.

For most of 1967, St. Lucy's fell well behind Blessed Sacrament and the Boston Crusaders, but appeared in the World Open, placing third; the American Legion Nationals in Boston, where they finished in fifth place; and their first CYO Nationals, ending up sixth.

The next season was one of their strongest and a year of dramatic developments. John Flowers became drum instructor and invented a variation on horizontal tuned bass drums, with long aluminum cylinders attached to the bottom of the double-drum contraption in an effort to achieve resonance.

The experiment lasted for only one year, but Flowers came back in 1969 with the first (and perhaps only) carried cymbal rack, played with sticks and mallets.

St. Lucy's won 35 out of 40 competitions entered that season, including a dramatic two-point win over the Boston Crusaders at Bridgeport, CT (five points ahead of Garfield



St. Lucy's Cadets and the famous cymbal rack, 1969 (photo by Moe Knox from the collection of Drum Corps World).

defending its American Legion title in Atlanta. A fourth-place finish in prelims, 3.5 points behind Blessed Sacrament and even closer to the Cavaliers and the Troopers, gave them a glimmer of hope.

While they held fourth in finals, the deficit was 11 points behind the victorious Cavaliers. The end had come for St. Lucy's. The corps was officially disbanded one week later.

In 1977, the St. Lucy's senior corps was formed and lasted for a year and a half.

Appearances at parades brought back some of the corps' repertoire from the past, but the time had not yet arrived for alumni corps and St. Lucy's would have to wait until 1991 for their next appearance.

As part of the parish's 100th anniversary, a few of the remaining original members of the competing corps

were joined by alumni from many of their former competitors to honor one of the great junior drum and bugle corps of the past.

Three of St. Lucy's best numbers -- *El Conquistador*, *This Love of Mine* and the *Hallelujah Chorus* -- were played for the grateful parishioners celebrating their service to the faithful of the venerable church and community.

But the corps wasn't quite done.

For the 2000 Greater Alliance of Seniors reunion in Valley Forge, PA, St. Lucy's Cadets Alumni was formed, with original members, competitors and even former instructors in their ranks.

The corps is still in operation and performs twice yearly, at both G.A.S. and (as the New Jersey Drum Corps Alumni) the New Jersey Drum Corps Hall of Fame banquet.

They are instructed by John "Duke" Terreri (1959-1969) on horns and Harold "Chew" Gernandt (1959-1965) on drums. Performers include D'Amico, Flowers, Pisillo and Russo.

St. Lucy's strongly represented the

accomplishment and fate that accompanied most of the parish-based drum and bugle corps of the 1950s and 1960s.

Organized as a youth activity for parishioners, at first they embodied the neighborhood spirit of fun and family, with loyal fans supporting their every effort. The parish succeeded in giving the young men and women an activity in which they could participate with pride and dignity.

When the corps went to nationals in those early years, an entourage of parishioners and parents would accompany the

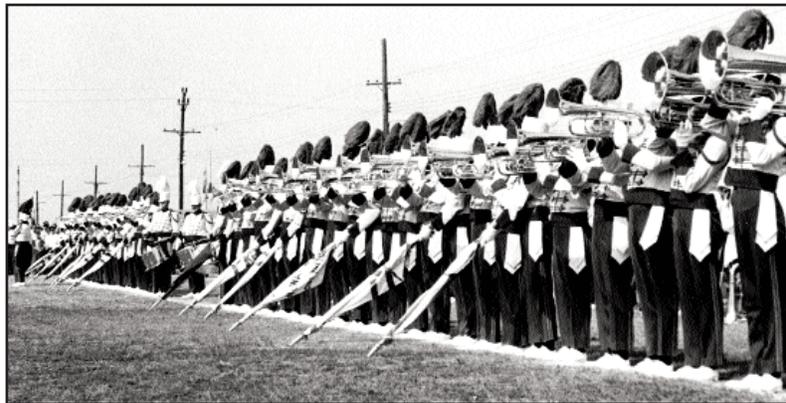
boys and girls on a week-long vacation to cheer them on through victory or defeat.

When they returned home, victorious or not, the corps would march down Seventh Avenue to the cheers and adulation of hundreds of fans and parishioners, past the rectory, past the community center where they practiced and in front of the church they proudly represented.

But as the years went by, the turmoil of the 1960s and the deterioration of inner cities led to a change in corps membership and the last years saw few marchers from the parish left in the ranks.

Gone were the local fans and the family support that made parish corps such a vibrant part of the community.

St. Lucy's Cadets will forever stand as a hard-nosed competitor that brought its share of innovation and thrills to the drum corps activity of the day. The last of the Eastern American Legion National Champions, the red, white and blue corps from Newark held an enviable record of accomplishment and left an enduring legacy of the time when drum corps were thriving in the streets of American cities.



St. Lucy's Cadets, 1968 (photo by Ron Da Silva from the collection of Drum Corps World).

and seven in front of Blessed Sacrament), their only National Dream contest championship and their lone American Legion National Championship, a whopping 19 points ahead of the second-place finisher in New Orleans.

They also ended the season with their second American Legion state title.

The last competitive year for St. Lucy's saw a series of frustrations that whittled down the essence of a parish drum corps into a proud, but defeated, champion. Frank Pisillo, who had been assisting the horn line since 1962, became the corps' lead instructor for their final year.

By mid-season, St. Lucy's had fallen well behind the leaders and a decision was made to change the entire second half of the show. Hasty preparations for a comeback resulted in humiliating defeats (by mid-July, they were 12 points behind Boston and last in several competitions). Russo led the corps on crutches for most of the year.

Opting to skip the VFW Nationals in Philadelphia, the corps set its sights on



Ron Bonadonna began his life-long love affair with drum corps in 1952 at the age of six as a member of the feeder corps for St. Mary's Cadets from Nutley, NJ.

His first year of competitive marching was with the Paterson Cadets in 1960. When Paterson folded, he joined St. Lucy's in 1961. (Neither St. Mary's nor Paterson ever won a contest, nor had St. Lucy's in 1961.)

He played soprano until 1964 and was in the original all-boy color guard in 1965. His greatest moment was winning his first contest in July 1963.

Bonadonna marched with St. Lucy's senior corps in 1977-1978 on soprano and is presently a member of four alumni corps: the Blessed Sacrament Golden Knights, Archer-Epler Musketeers, New York Skyliners and St. Lucy's Cadets alumni corps.

He is also banquet chairman for the New Jersey Drum Corps Hall of Fame.