

Band alum marches to aid of drum corps

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EAST ALTON - Delta Regiment co-director Mark North more than doubled its drum line with the help of a former Marching 100 buddy.

Dr. Andrew "Andy" Dykeman contacted several friends and colleagues to help Delta Regiment get the instruments it needed to expand its drum corps. In that effort, Dykeman, who played with North in Alton High School's Marching 100, collected numerous harnesses, four bass drums, crash cymbals, drumsticks, mallets, drumheads and five snare drums, which he gave to North on Tuesday.

After Dykeman read a January article in The Telegraph about the need of Delta Regiment's co-directors, who include North's wife, Kathleen, Dykeman set out to fill the drum corps' need for instruments and musical accessories.

"Now, we can have about 14 drummers out there," said Mark North, who graduated from Alton High School in 1984, one year before Dykeman. "That's high school or college size."

Delta Regiment began three years ago with two young members and has grown to 86 since the word got around about the couple's guidance of troubled youth.

The Norths started the program to teach children how to play drums, perform color guard and spin marching rifles. At the same time, the couple teaches youths self-respect and respecting others, discipline, first aid, four-season survival skills, water safety, self-defense, edible plants and animals, and poisonous plants and animals. Children also receive academic tutoring.

The curriculum came from the military background of Mark North, who retired from the U.S. Army in 2003. Alton Police Chief David Hayes said he supports the Norths' efforts.

North received more good news Tuesday after returning home with the Regiment's new instruments. Anchorman Mike Bush of KSDK-TV Channel 5 in St. Louis left a message that he wanted to feature Delta Regiment in a newscast, North said.

In the Marching 100, North played snare and Dykeman played bass drum. But North always treated Dykeman as if he played snare, the "cooler" drum when the pair played in the 1980s, they said.

"We really teased people, but I didn't let anyone pick on Andy," North said.

"You were nice," Dykeman confirmed with a laugh, while the two sat in Dykeman's office waiting room Tuesday at Rosewood Chiropractic Clinic in East Alton.

Now, the two share a common goal to enable as many youngsters as possible to play an instrument, particularly percussion. Oddly, the two never saw each other or talked after high school until now.

"It doesn't seem that long. You look the same," North told Dykeman.

North, born and raised in Alton, also played drums during his high school years in the Phantom Regiment Drum Corps and the Black Knights Drum Corps. Kathleen North, originally from Georgia, teaches flags to the youngsters and coaches a praise dance team in Delta Regiment.

Only a handful of Delta Regiment's 86 members could perform at any given event prior to Dykeman's donation. The Norths teach everyone to play or twirl, but they only had enough instruments for just 12 children to play together.

"I wanted the kids to play the drums," said Dykeman, who graduated from Logan College of Chiropractic, based in Chesterfield, Mo.

Playing in the drum line motivates the youngsters to do their homework, North said.

Now that Dykeman has reconnected with North, Dykeman intends to get back into music. Dykeman retired from music when his former punk band, Judge Nothing, broke up, even though its original music made late 1990s soundtracks for "Dawson's Creek" and "Party of Five." Last weekend, the band temporarily reunited to play in Edwardsville.

"I'm going to continue this. Delta Regiment got me going again," Dykeman said.

The Norths operate Delta Regiment out of their Alby Street home with their own money. They often have meals for their charges and their families. Since January, Riverbend Community Food Pantry, operating out of Open Door Fellowship, regularly donates food items to the Norths, who distribute the items to the youth and their families who need it.

The Norths have four sons: Keagon, 17, who plays in the Regiment on the quad; Raven, 7; Nodin, 6; and Elan, 5 months old.

Delta Regiment's next public performance as of Tuesday is for Church Women United in a race relations program at 5 p.m. Sunday, April 11, at Lead the Way Christian Church, 1145 College Ave.

For questions or more information, e-mail the Norths at deltaregiment@charter.net, or call them at (618) 433-9034.

The Norths currently are trying to get 501(3)c nonprofit status for Delta Regiment.

Visit www.myspace.com/deltaregiment for more information.