

The History of Carolina Crown

The organization started in January **1988** as the Charlotte Drum Corps Association. Originally, the organization resembled a fraternal organization, holding periodic meetings at the Holiday Inn -Woodlawn or a local Charlotte (NC) restaurant. The association members, made up of drum corps enthusiasts and/or alumni originally from the Northeast, Midwest and South, watched videos and discussed the happenings of the day in the activity. The first person elected president was Bill Loelius, with Kevin Smith as vice president and Luanne Bialecki as Secretary-Treasurer.

During that first year, the organization also took on the extremely large task of organizing and running two drum corps shows: Southern Gold Classic, a Drum Corps East sanctioned event held at Davidson College, and the first Drum Corps International sanctioned NightBEAT, held at Memorial Stadium in uptown Charlotte, it's home to this day. The two shows, and hence the entire organization as we now know it, would never have even got off the ground had not several of the board members paid the initial deposits on the show contract fees. Southern Gold Classic was very poorly attended and lost money. NightBEAT, even though it drew a decent crowd, would have lost money as well had the organization's first big sponsor and partner come through out of nowhere.

A few weeks after NightBEAT the organization had little money in the bank, but one very large bill. The fee for the use of the stadium had not yet been paid to the Charlotte Parks & Recreation Department. NightBEAT Chairperson Doug Madar, with Bill Loelius and Kevin Smith providing moral support, went to the office of Parks Superintendent Marvin Billups with their knees knocking from nerves hoping to work out a payment plan of some sort that would allow us to survive. After hearing our pleas and plans for this new organization dedicated to bringing one of America's great youth activities to Charlotte each summer, Marvin truly shocked us by not only writing off the entire bill, but also by offering a full sponsorship for the stadium for the future. This was the first of many great "breaks" the organization would get over the years and the start of a fantastic partnership that continues today with Mecklenburg County Parks & Recreation headed by Crown-supporter Wayne Weston.

Thanks to the work of Doug Madar, in **1989** the Queen City Optimists donated \$1000 to the organization with the stipulation that if we accepted the donation we had to start a performance group of some type. We discussed a few possibilities at the time including a percussion line to march in parades (something that there really is not many of in the south). We finally decided that we should go ahead and start a drum corps. So the first thing we looked for was a set of drums, since that was a more readily available and cheaper option than bugles. Doug located a full set of marching percussion for sale by a now-defunct corps from southern Florida. Of course, we were told the drums were in "good condition". Needless to say when Doug and Kevin opened the boxes at the warehouse in Charlotte where they were delivered to they were devastated! Nearly every drum in the set was damaged beyond repair!

It was at this point that break #2 occurred for Carolina Crown. Ludwig Industries, the premier drum company for many of the drum corps activity's developing years happened to have a manufacturing plant in Monroe, NC just south of Charlotte. Ludwig's drum corps representative at the time, John Cummings, was assigned to this plant and he came to our rescue by offering to repair the drums as part of an informal sponsorship deal. Although he never admitted it, to this day we believe the beautiful drums we received back from John were actually a new, or nearly new set rather than the destroyed set we gave them to repair. Regardless, we were on our way with the first pieces of equipment we could call our own!

During a meeting at the Holiday Inn-Woodlawn that fall it was decided to hold a contest among the association membership to name the new drum corps we wanted to establish. Although no single person came up with the name Carolina Crown, several people played a part in coming up with the basis for it. The group decided that we wanted to expand our influence beyond just the Charlotte area, and hence the Carolina portion of the name was established. However, the Crown portion was a more subtle tie to the city where the organization began, as Charlotte is known as the “Queen City” since it was named after Queen Charlotte, and the city’s logo includes a crown. It wasn’t long after that the corps’ graphic artist Andy Crews designed the corps’ first logo (similar to the current logo in design with the bugle inside of a crown, but teal and purple were the original corps colors), and Steve Tant of what is now Advantage Signs of Charlotte started putting it on signs, banners and the sides of our vehicles.

About this same time in the fall of **1989**, Bill Loelius, Doug Madar and Kevin Smith held a meeting at the Holiday Inn–Woodlawn with several young and enthusiastic local band directors including: Don Flewell, Cecil Adderley, Bill Register, Van Mathews, and Joe Shively. These young educators, fresh out of the ranks of Suncoast Sound, Spirit of Atlanta and the Madison Scouts listened cautiously but with great interest as we shared our vision of a new drum corps in the Charlotte area. By the end of the meeting, all but Joe Shively had signed on as the core of Carolina Crown’s 1st-year *volunteer* faculty. That’s right, not only did this group of up-and-coming Charlotte-area band directors agree to the tremendous challenge of starting a new drum corps, they also agreed to do it for free! (Something that was critical for a start-up corps with very little seed money in the bank!) At this same meeting, Kevin Smith agreed to become the corps’ interim director while the organization awaited the arrival from out-of-state of the person they had planned on leading the group. (He basically never showed up and Kevin has had the job ever since!) Added to the group of core faculty members shortly after this meeting included other Carolinas’ educators Vince Thomas and Gil Doggett.

So now with drums and the beginnings of a faculty the next challenge was to find bugles. Fortunately, we located the unthinkable: a complete set of matched bugles in storage in California that were owned by the now-defunct California Dons. So, having learned our lesson of purchasing instruments sight-unseen, we put Van Mathews on a plane to California just weeks before the planned date of the corps’ first audition camp. Luckily, Van found the bugles in good condition, and Doug negotiated a favorable payment plan with the owner that allowed us to pay them off over about nine months (a workable plan given the continued growth of NightBEAT each of these early years). So, for the start of the winter camp season for the 1990 drum corps season we had drums, bugles and a faculty ready to go! Some think this was the organization’s 3rd lucky break!

Well, things didn’t go quite that easy when in early December we held the first audition camp at Concord HS. After getting over the hurdles encountered to this point, who would have expected Mother Nature in the form of a major snowstorm to slow, but not stop our forward movement? Well, a total of nine students showed up for those first auditions including Rod Gornto, a bassoon player (yes, I said bassoon!) from Columbia, SC. Rod was the first student to audition for Carolina Crown, and went on to march many years in the activity as an award-winning mellophone player. A second audition camp held a couple of weeks later was better attended and helped provide the 61 charter members of the 1990 corps (including current and former board members Mekel Rogers, Keith Miller and Philip Rainer).

That first Carolina Crown in **1990** certainly was a much different one than the current corps. Thanks to our partnership with the Parks & Recreation Department, and the establishment of

a new partnership with the Mecklenburg Council of the Boy Scouts of America as Explorer Post #588, we gained access for camps at Elizabeth Elementary School and Park in Uptown Charlotte near Memorial Stadium. The Parks Department also allowed us to use a storage facility in an old building adjacent to the park known as "The Annex". One of the organization's first major mistakes occurred during one of those first camps at Elizabeth Elementary. After a heated discussion by our new, young and enthusiastic faculty (which even included a prediction that the corps would end up in 13th Place the first year), we decided to declare Open Class (Division I) status rather than Class A (Division II). (By June, we knew we had made a mistake but Drum Corps International would not allow us to change.)

Even though Kevin was the corps' director, this first year the operations and decisions of the corps were to a large degree handled by a truly "working board". We established our first budget of \$56,000 (a very small percentage of the organization's current budget), and sweated over where that much money would come from! "Everydays", or Spring Training as we now call it, was held at the park on a 9am-5pm schedule to allow the corps members the opportunity to hold evening jobs. Host housing was secured for the few "out-of-towners" that lived too far away to commute on a daily basis. When the corps left on the first part of what was just a 13 show first-year tour made up of mostly early-season Drum Corps East sanctioned events we pulled out in just two charter buses, Kevin's personal mini-van, and one 24' box truck that carried everything: food, souvenirs, uniforms and equipment! (Board President Bill Loelius was driving the truck and was pulled over on the way to the show for passing a weigh-station, and then not having the truck's registration as it had blown out the window moments earlier!). The first show of the season for the 61-member Carolina Crown was in Cary, NC and the new drum corps from North Carolina really made an impression. We broke onto the drum corps scene with our all borrowed (and miniature) front ensemble, homemade waiter jacket uniforms, and a start of the "You Got Trouble" opener from our "The Music Man" production from a "dress center" position (oops!)! Well, our appearance at the Drum Corps International World Championships in Buffalo and our 33rd Place finish (that was actually the lowest we could mathematically finish that year in Open Class preliminary competition), made it all worth it! It was a very emotional time in the parking lot after the corps came off the field when we realized we had done it... there really was now a Carolina Crown! And, remember where it happened, as Buffalo will turn out to be a special place for Carolina Crown in future years!

The first corps banquet was held on November 24, **1990** at the start of the corps' second season. We were quick to fix our earlier mistake and declared the corps as Class A (Division II). That winter also brought about the corps' first tragedy. Kerry Srdar and wife Carol quite accidentally fell in love with the drum corps activity and Carolina Crown at NightBEAT. Kerry's passion and commitment for the organization and its members made him an easy choice as Kevin's first Assistant Director at the start of the **1991** season. Unfortunately, Kerry died in March at the too-young age of 40, leaving Carol and the entire organization stunned. However, his memory lives on thanks to Carol's hard work at raising money in Kerry's name from the many people he touched in his brief time with the organization. Many of the corps' capital purchases over the years have been made thanks to these donations and several of them bear his name (e.g., The Kerry Srdar Memorial Cookwagon). Carol also gave the corps Kerry's panel van for use as the corps' first souvenir vehicle that year.

The corps warmed-up for the **1991** season with an exhibition of their "The Music of Prokofiev" production at the Coca-Cola 500 at Charlotte Motor Speedway before what was billed as 125,000 spectators. It was also the first year of a "move-in" type Spring Training thanks to a relationship with Belmont Abbey College that lasted through 1996. The tour was rather uneventful until we returned to Charlotte. Although we received repeated promises

from our local weather forecaster that the evening's storm would not last long in the Charlotte area, lightning continued for most of the night and NightBEAT had to be canceled leaving many angry fans. In fact, it also became the "hangman's noose" year as some demented soul hung a noose (which Steve Tant still has to this day) outside the Annex facility as a message to us. With the cancellation of our only large fundraiser, there was much discussion as to whether or not we could afford to finish out the season. Thankfully, the decision was made to still send the corps to Drum Corps International Championships in Dallas. Unfortunately, along the way we ended up in a very disappointing 6th Place at the DCI-South Regional in Birmingham (with many of the top Division II corps not even in attendance). But, with hard work and determination the corps came out of Dallas a week later in 2nd Place in Division II Finals (taking all captions except percussion), and 25th in Open Class Quarterfinals. The 25th Place finish earned the corps member status in Drum Corps International, a critical component to the corps' swift rise within the activity in the coming years.

In **1992** (through 1995) the organization opened their first office at 5018 Park Road in Charlotte (prior to this, and even for some time afterwards, much of the organization and drum corps was run out of the homes of Kevin and others). It was also the year that Ludwig's Jim Catalano offered the corps a full endorsement sponsorship and provided Carolina Crown with their first complete set of free drums. The corps' "The Dances of Malcom Arnold" was a very subtle, yet beautiful production that brought the corps its first-ever (and one of three that year) 1st Place finish in Division II (7/16/92, Bensalem, PA; 67.40 over Jersey Surf and Muskateers). The program improved right into Finals in Madison where it earned Carolina Crown a 3rd Place finish in Division II competition, once again taking honors in the brass, color guard, and drum major captions. Another 25th Place finish in Division I quarterfinals confirmed that the prior year's membership in Drum Corps International was not a fluke.

1993 saw the re-establishment of the South's own drum corps circuit, Drum Corps South, when the now emerging Southern corps (Carolina Crown, Magic of Orlando, Southwind, etc) decided it was time to break away from Drum Corps East. This year also saw the organization hire their first full time employee, Joe Rosemond, as Director of Development. Carolina Crown turned many heads when they came out on tour that year with new, and very colorful, uniform accessory colors to fit the flavor of their "La Fiesta Mexicana" production. The original box truck used by the corps was replaced with a "dually" pick-up (through 1996) that pulled a 28' trailer donated by the (Ralph) Stewart family. That was the positive half of the transportation story in 1993. The (very) negative side was that the organization made their 2nd mistake of their short history by buying two (very) old buses. In theory it seemed like the way to go at the time, but the outcome was that we ended up naming the buses by the city where we left them along the side of the road! The corps prevailed even with this major distraction and challenge by winning the Division II Championships in Jackson, MS, including high honors in brass, general effect, and perhaps most importantly percussion which had eluded the corps for several years. The victory was made extra sweet with Crown's 21st place finish in Division I competition. At the conclusion of the season Kevin Smith was named the Division II Director of the Year.

Carolina Crown's fifth year (**1994**) saw the corps moving into Division I competition full time for the first time in their history with their production "A Southwestern Impression". Unfortunately, right before the corps left on tour it was realized that Ludwig's new "floating head" drums were not going to hold up through the season. Board member Ralph Stewart Jr. came to the corps' rescue by figuring out a way to get the money to buy another set of Pearl drums right before going on tour. It certainly ended up helping, as new ground was

broken yet again as Carolina Crown achieved Semi-Finalist status for the first time with a 17th place finish in Division I Finals in Boston.

In **1995** the organization made two physical moves. The office moved to the Charlotte Merchandise Mart and we “moved” (at least for rehearsals and storage) the corps to Belmont, NC a small town west of Charlotte. The corps’ production of “Stormworks” necessitated some changes to the uniform accessories, including black shakos, cumberbun, gauntlets, and a unique lightning bolt sash. The corps also leased the Suncoast Sound food semi-trailer for the season. Finals were in Buffalo, where Rich Stadium was again a special place for Carolina Crown. The site of Carolina Crown's first performance in a Drum Corps International World Championships was ironically, six years later, the stadium in which Carolina Crown gave its first “top-12” performance (11th Place). Before Finals night even took place, the corps also was offered a full endorsement sponsorship from the Avedis Zildjian cymbal company (which continues today).

During the winter of the **1996** season Carolina Crown began a multi-corps effort to develop a management agreement with Youth Education in the Arts! (YEA!). The bottom-line objective of this agreement was for corps like Carolina Crown, Magic, Boston Crusaders and Crossmen to centralize some critical core services of our organizations for the purpose of reducing expenses and/or improving service to our members, faculty and volunteers. As the spring approached, the Suncoast Sound organization went bankrupt and the corps purchased their food trailer (plus some old equipment that was thrown in on the deal). The endorsement of Remo drumheads and our sponsorship by High Tech Signs (both of which continue today) followed shortly after. The corps also purchased their first set of professionally designed uniforms in 1996, giving the corps a whole new look for their “Chess and the Art of Strategy” production. The new look and innovative show helped the corps win their first Division I show ever (the first of three on 7/9/96 in Chattanooga, TN; 65.80 over Magic of Orlando, Southwind, Spirit of Atlanta and Lone Star) and first regional association championship, capturing the Drum Corps South title. The corps marched 124 members during this season, but no one in the audience could tell for the first two minutes of the program as corps members darted in and out from behind two-story high moving chess pieces. The effect captivated the crowds and the judges, as the corps went on to place 10th at Finals (their highest placement yet). The season, however, did have its ups-and-down. The bottom point being a very serious accident in the middle of the night outside Houston when the semi-trailer carrying the 32 chess pieces was struck from behind by another truck (fortunately, no-one from the corps was badly hurt and we saved or repaired all the chess pieces). On a lighter note, Carolina Crown alum Marcus Jones got pulled over in the dually by a Michigan State Trooper after not paying at a fuel stop due to a miscommunication with Kevin.

During the **1997** winter camp season Crown suffered the very stunning loss of 2nd year brass member Mandy Buchanan, who died in an apparent hiking accident in the North Carolina mountains. Better news then came in the form of the corps entering into product endorsement agreements with Pearl, Vic Firth, and Upfront Footwear (Dinkle marching shoes). The corps’ administrative team began to “ride in style” thanks to the donation of Ralph Stewart Jr.’s customized van. The corps fleet this year also included our first semi-trailer for the transport of our equipment. NightBEAT celebrated its 10th Anniversary in 1997 and the corps looked and sounded great performing their Postcards from Britain production. The show produced a 12th place finish at Finals. The highlight of Final’s week to many of the members was being housed at Disney’s brand new Coronado Springs resort when Drum Corps International could not find a school facility for the corps (or the Cavaliers, who also were housed at Coronado Springs). Our move to Belmont ended up being a flop due in part to small-town politics, but mainly because the organization never really became part of the

community. When we moved the organization's office to Ft. Mill in November of 1997 we did so determined to not make the same mistake. Our office at 227A Main Street, in a building owned by Crown Assistant Director Chip Smith, and our "Partnership in Education" with the Fort Mill Bands have provided for a very favorable relationship with this small town just over the South Carolina border from the organization's roots in Charlotte.

In **1998** the organization began its band and winter color guard supply business, TheCrownStore, which still continues today with its e-commerce site www.thecrownstore.com. As a way of developing and nurturing new and existing volunteers the organization began holding CrownClub meetings at some of their winter camps which featured presentations on the corps and the drum corps activity by both corps faculty members and outside guests. It was this winter that the corps received an instrument repair sponsorship from Hames Music of Gaffney, SC. The organization also began an initiative to join forces with local band programs with a "Partnership in Education", first initiated with the Fort Mill Band. The winter season was highly successful and it produced the organization's first full-sized corps of 128 members. The summer tour also went very well even though we had a close call from a tornado at the Tulsa show. The corps housed in an Orlando-area hotel after their housing fell through again just days before our arrival for Finals week. The 1998 production of "Heros...Then and Now" presented the symphonic music of Alfred Reed, and brought the corps an 11th Place finish at Finals. Championship week also saw the corps' first Drum Corps International Individuals winner, Sean Cooney (who also repeated his feat in 2001 and 2002). Kevin Smith was also selected Drum Corps International Volunteer of the Year. The best thing to come out of 1998 for the organization though had to be the start of the Carolina Crown Golf Tournament; created, organized and run by the board member Carol Srdar. (The event made a very respectable \$13,000 as a first-year effort, but has since developed into the organization's largest single fundraiser, having raised over a quarter million dollars in it's first five years!)

The corps celebrated its 10th Anniversary season in **1999**. Over the winter, Crown supporters attended the 1st YEA! Volunteer Weekend in New York City (an idea which was the basis for our current CrownClub Weekend for our volunteers and supporters). Also, 1999 was the first year of a 3-year agreement in which Crown provided management support to Carolina Visual Productions, a Raleigh-based winter color guard. The show selected this year was based on the Broadway hit musical "Jekyll and Hyde". The season was kicked off with Crown Preview as well as start of a new initiative, the Carolina Summer Clinic, an educational seminar for area band directors and their staffs, which continues today. The corps had a very good year overall in 1999, finishing in 11th Place at Finals, however, many will remember this corps for the strength of its color guard, which finished in 6th Place. One thing that happened on tour that is somewhat amusing now but wasn't at the time was the running over of a contra bass by one of the corps' buses in a housing site parking lot.

The winter of **2000** saw the establishment of our highly successful Honor Band initiative with the 1st Annual York County Middle School Honor Band (which continues today). Also, this winter Crown Guard was established in Dayton, OH by Crown guard designer Michael Shapiro (the group was a 3-time Independent World Class Finalist before disbanding after the 2002 season). The corps left on tour in 2000 with two new additions to its caravan, a 15-passenger van purchased to pull the souvenir trailer and haul volunteers and a 22-foot motorhome loaned to the corps by support staff Ben and Teri Brinson as the corps' traveling administrative offices. The show this year featured music from the recent film The Mask of Zorro, and featured sultry black costumes worn by the color guard that enhanced the mood (and the male spectators at the Bristol, RI parade!). The season was very successful competitively with the corps finishing in 11th Place, and the amazing Carolina Crown percussionists turning in a seventh place finish on Finals night.

2001 brought the end of our 3-year relationship with YEA! As a result, the corps signed its own 3-year endorsement agreement with Pearl, as well as an agreement with new partner Innovative Percussion (both of which continue today). As a result of input from the prior season's Year-end Member Survey, the new Student Leadership Task Force was formed behind chairperson and drum major David Roth. The overall goal of this initiative, which continues as strong as ever today, is to assist in the development of leadership skills among the corps' members. Another new event established this winter was our CrownClub Weekend, an educational and fun event for volunteers, alumni, parents and supporters. The charter year of this continuing event was appropriately held at the "Crown Reef" resort in Myrtle Beach. The organization's Executive Committee made a very important, and proactive decision over the winter months to purchase new Dynasty horns and sell the corps' G-bugles while there was still a market to do so. The corps had hoped to premiere the new horns, their "Industry" production and "new look", black uniform pants donated by Crown Assistant Director Chip Smith's friend Charles Coleman, on the field at Crown's Preview show however rain forced the event into Ft. Mill HS auditorium. Besides the indoor concert by the corps, the organization was also able to still begin new "traditions" of honoring all the corps' alumni at Preview, as well as recognizing their long-term volunteers (both of which continue today). The corps got back into bus ownership in 2001 by purchasing and using a 1979 MC-9 motorcoach. With the corps going West for the first time in their history (visiting Casper, Denver, Albuquerque, and El Paso), both the Crown bus and the older buses we leased showed their age from the strain of the high altitude and above-average temperatures with numerous over-heatings and air conditioning problems. To make matters worse, we blew the engine in the motorhome in Wyoming and lost its use for about a week. The corps' "Industry" production, a show that used innovative ways of creating different sounds and visual touches with the raw materials used in construction, was a "hit" and the corps placed 10th at Finals, besting the two-time DCI champion Madison Scouts for the first time in the corps history. Carol Srdar and Doug Madar were also honored as Drum Corps International Volunteers of the Year prior to the event.

2002 was a year for big enhancements in the area of transportation equipment for Crown. Over the winter we purchased a "new" 48' air-ride equipment trailer, and Crown volunteer extraordinaire Larry Gibson (and others) spent months building up the inside and repairing and painting the outside to produce a much larger and improved trailer. Also over the winter the organization expanded their Partnership in Education with Ft. Mill Schools to include a bus usage agreement involving Crown's owned bus. Then in the spring, Crown Transportation Coordinator Steve Hoyle pulled off the best move of the year by securing the lease of three late model 53-passenger Van Hool buses that enabled the members to ride in air conditioned "luxury" all summer long! The only negative on the transportation front during the season was when we blew the engine in the motor home again with only a week left in the season and had to finish the tour without it. As for performance equipment, by the middle of the season Dynasty replaced all our new horns with even newer "Tune Any Note" models which gave the brass line brand new horns to play on for the second year in a row. A highly successful new initiative, the Carolina Crown Summer Music Camp, was held just prior to the start of Spring Training that attracted about 80 high school students for a full day of instruction from Crown faculty members. Another new "tradition" of recognizing past board members was also initiated at our 2002 Preview event. Unfortunately, the combination of an extremely tough year of competition, and a production of "Greek Mythology: Stories of Gods and Heroes" that never really seemed to fully impress the judging community, resulted in a 16th Place finish and the first time in eight years that the corps did not make Finals. Crown Support Services Coordinator Teri Brinson was however the 4th Crown volunteer honored as a Drum Corps International Volunteer of the Year at World Championships.

The **2003** season was truly amazing. Coming off the “down” competitive season of 2002 the organization took the opportunity to re-invent itself... to create a “new” Carolina Crown. The first piece of the equation was adding Jim Coates as the corps’ Program/ Faculty Coordinator. Jim proceeded to put together a top-notch design and senior faculty team, that were not only great educators, but a true “team”, many of which having worked together in the past. They then proceeded to tackle the 2nd challenge, and did so by designing a tremendously popular program in “Bell-issimo”. The Carolina Crown Board of Directors and supporters get all the credit for item #3. They found a way in a tough economy to approve and deliver a set of new uniforms that dramatically changed the look of the corps from previous years and were the talk of the activity. The corps looked fantastic in their cream and purple when they unveiled them at the annual Preview show, even if it was only a standstill due to adverse field conditions at Ft. Mill HS. We established a new early season show “FirstBEAT”, held at Waddell HS in Charlotte, however, our perennial super show “NightBEAT”, also had to settle for standstills by all the corps as adverse field conditions due to rain just before the show prevented area fans from seeing the corps march their shows! Other than the weather, the season was filled with excitement and milestones. During DCI Championships week in Orlando our Individual and Ensemble entries performed wonderfully, with five being crowned champions in their respective captions. The five "golds" were more than any other corps accumulated. The corps’ scores through the season climbed a whopping 28.95 from low to high for the season, with the 88.85 score and 9th Place in Quarterfinals of DCI Championships week being records for the corps. The corps’ 10th Place finish and eighth Finalist appearance in 14 years was largely due to the fantastic program design, and the guard and percussion placing as high as 4th and 7th, respectively, in championship competition.

The **2004** season definitely felt like just a continuation of the great things begun the year before. The entire design team and senior faculty returned and began work on the corps’ production, Bohemia! We had record turnouts for our audition camps, and also held our first-ever one-day remote auditions for brass students in Indiana and Texas. The brass line received and performed the complete show by the February camp (a record!), and the full corps performed the entire show at the March camp (also a record!). The entire opener was marched and played by the end of the May camp (another record!). The Crown Board came through again in 2004 when they approved the purchase of a new set of King Ultimate Marching Instruments, as well as the building that houses the Crown office. They also approved making Jim Coates full time as the corps’ new Chief Operating Officer, while retaining his duties as Program/ Faculty Coordinator. An era ended in the transportation area as we sold the “Crown bus”, along with replacing the support van with a newer model, and doing some interior renovations on the equipment trailer. Spring Training was held at Indian Land HS (SC), where we finished putting the entire show on the field a full 10 days prior to leaving on tour (yet another record!). The tour began with our FirstBEAT show, held at Jay M. Robinson HS (NC) for the first time. Unfortunately, it was a standstill after a severe rainstorm hit the area just prior to the start of the show. From that first day of the season Crown became the activity’s controversy of the year due to our use of amplified voice during the “Seasons of Love” and “Beat Generation” portions of the show (generating a rules change petition with a reported 1000+ signatures plus lots of back and forth on the internet newsgroups!). Rain also affected NightBEAT in 2004, as the show was delayed 1 ½ hours before the corps could perform their complete field shows before the reserved-seat sellout of over 8000 screaming fans. The corps traveled to their most distant DCI World Championships in Denver (where we once again stayed in a hotel) to perform before the largest crowds in many years. And perform they did! Both a record-high score of 92.175 and a 6th Place finish (another record!) were achieved by the corps in Semifinals. The corps eventual 7th Place finish in Finals definitely established Carolina Crown as one of the top

corps in the activity, and was a tremendous way to conclude the corps' 15th Anniversary season!

The **2005** season was definitely a continuation of the great things begun the two years before. Although our competitive placement was exactly the same (7th) as it was the year before, the 2006 corps was much improved. The "Angelus" production was another great success thanks in large part to the caliber and experience of a returning design team and many faculty members. As the season progressed the vast improvement of the horn line was very evident as everyone we spoke to raved about the line's "wall of sound". An indication that the Crown family was growing was the year's orders for tickets in the Crown block for the 2005 World Championships being the most ever sold. We also continued the very large turnouts for our audition camps, and enhanced our one-day remote auditions in Indiana and Texas by including color guard in Indy. At our full corps camps we ran two brass tracks for the first few months, providing high-level brass instruction for about 125 students instead of the normal 70-80 at that time of year. The tour began with a spectacular FirstBEAT show with a stacked line-up that helped to not only draw a great crowd in the stadium, but also to set a new attendance record for our free Summer Clinic for band directors held in the afternoon of the show. NightBEAT, although attendance was down, was also a tremendous night as the corps won top honors before thousands of local band students, parents and friends. 2005 saw us begin an endorsement agreement with Fred J. Miller Company that provided replacement corps uniform parts; corps shoes; guard uniforms and sponsorship of our 1st Annual Leadership Clinic held the afternoon of NightBEAT. We also ran a successful 1st Annual Marching Percussion Clinic sponsored by Pearl, Innovative Percussion & Remo, and our new Drum Major Symposium entitled "THE MODERN CONDUCTOR, Leading the band in the 21st Century", was held in conjunction with Spring Training. Just before the season started we purchased a mini-bus and outfitted it with 5 bunks to upgrade the experience for our volunteers on tour. We also successfully returned to doing our own merchandising operations in 2005, purchasing a new souvenir trailer just before we left on tour. The skyrocketing price of fuel prices all summer long was a big financial drain on Crown and all the other corps.

The **2006** season was another great year for "The Cream Team". We again had large turnouts at our camps and the faculty did a great job teaching our fantastic design team's "In.Trance.it" production as well as several well-received encore tunes. We established the new position of Director of Operations & Education as an enhancement of our Partnership in Education program, and hired Ray Linkous to fill the role. The Band Hall partnered with us to make our guard uniforms and two sets of the show flags, and a new agreement with Conn-Selmer called for the horn line to play on new King horns for both 2006 and 2007! Jim Coates, long-time support staff member Ron Murphy and various other volunteers worked throughout the spring to design and outfit our new food trailer using money donated by our supporters during our Holiday Fund drive. We sponsored a new high school honor band event in Mecklenburg County (NC) as well as a HS Band Director's In-Service Workshop that focused on the use of strategies, philosophies, and techniques to improve the quality of a student's educational experience through the marching band activity. We also filmed a TV commercial that promoted the new NC Education Lottery using about 25 members, alums and their college student friends. In the spring, the 2004 "Bohemia" production being voted by fans to be shown at the 2nd annual DCI Classic Countdown. We held our Spring Training rehearsals in a great South Pointe HS (SC) for the first, but hopefully not last time. We moved our successful "FirstBEAT" event to Irmo HS and established a new "CrownBEAT" event in partnership with West Johnston HS in Benson, NC. "CrownBEAT" had to be moved indoors due to bad weather all day but NightBEAT had a great crowd on a nice night in Charlotte! With a week left in the season DCI's Dan Acheson asked us to participate as the featured drum corps at the historic press conference in Indianapolis to announce DCI's move

to that city in 2008, as well as arranged for us to rehearse in the RCA Dome for the remainder of the day. A highlight of World Championship week was a 2006 DCI Volunteer of the Year award being presented to our own Steve Tant. And, although our final placement may have dropped to 8th, the corps and the entire organization had one of its strongest years ever! Our growing fan base showed their support through record merchandise sales and their tremendous ovation for the corps on Finals night!

“And, they’re off...” is a fitting way to begin telling the story of Crown’s remarkable **2007** season. There were many highlights and milestones of the corps’ best season ever! The fall was concluded with the sponsoring of our successful first annual BandBEAT, a Carolinas Marching Band Championship in partnership with East Lincoln HS band. The winter began with a brand new partnership with Yamaha that saw the corps receive all new equipment again. In addition, an enhanced relationship with Fred J. Miller brought about the development of the first of three show-oriented “looks” to new uniforms. We also bought and outfitted a new 53’ equipment trailer and sold our old one to our friends at South Pointe HS. In preparation for the start of the season we joined the Summer Tour Fuel Partners LLC, a group of DCI corps that banded together to hedge fuel prices and invested in a project whereby all the members received a personality assessment with hints on how to cope with life on tour. Due to an early start of the season Spring Training was moved to the great facilities at Gardner Webb University for the first 3 weeks followed by a week at West Wilkes Middle School. Members of the percussion line and a brass ensemble kicked off Spring Training by performing at two televised NASCAR events. The full corps previewed the music from their “Triple Crown” production as the opening act to the Denver & the Mile High Orchestra concert the organization sponsored in an attempt to broaden our fan base. The DCI tour started with a special show in Annapolis that included a mass horn and chorus performance of the Star Spangled Banner. The corps came out strong from the gate and won their first of five “Hot Chops” awards as part of a DCI fan online voting initiative. The season continued with many more milestones including scoring a first-ever 80 in June and a first-ever 90 in July. CrownMEDIA expanded through the establishment of the multi-corps CorpsTV project that attracted tens of thousands fans to our website throughout the summer. Although the corps’ first trip west of the Rockies was exciting for the corps it did take its toll on attendance at our events CrownBEAT, FirstBEAT and NightBEAT. These were slightly off-set by a grant from the Woodcock Foundation for the Appreciation of the Arts and our best-ever merchandise sales. However, everything about the corps’ California experience was great... rehearsing on the beach in Oceanside; a well-attended first-ever combined Age-out and Awards Dinner; ending the year with an all-time high score (94.15); winning the Spirit of Disney Award; drum major Evan VanDoren being awarded the Jim Jones Leadership Award; Ray & Mary McCrary being recognized as DCI Volunteers of the Year; and Kevin Smith accepting the Division I Director of the Year award on behalf of the entire “Team Crown”!