

Dennis Orr: Westwinds, How It All Started

Let me give you the beginning as it happened:

The seed for starting Westwinds was initiated from Harry Pinchin, director of Cosmopolitan in Edmonton until his retirement just recently. His job with the Alberta Band Directors Association for many years was to establish and develop community bands in Alberta. Therefore, he leaned on a lot of us to start a community band in Calgary. I had left teaching in Calgary to pursue a land development project in Sundre and was missing music, so I gave in and decided that this would be a great way to fill my music void.

I thought about it a lot and realized that if I wanted to be successful with the project there had to be more people involved than just me. More horses to share the load, each with special talents and abilities that would strengthen the band we were planning. Rod Pauls had been a friend and a colleague, and I admired his teaching and conducting abilities so I approached him first, with what at the time was a pretty loose plan. We decided that we needed financial support – from people who loved music – and Peter and Ildi Paulson were friends that I had worked with and whose children I had taught. Further, we felt that we needed a manager with business skills because we realized that organization and management are the first steps to a successful plan completion. Peter and Ildi graciously became involved, and Peter put up the first \$5,000.00 to get us rolling. I don't think he ever was paid back for this. There was a further connection here that is very important: Peter was a past student of Harry Pinchin on the trumpet, when Harry lived in Calgary. Harry was with the Lord Strathcona Band at the time but was busy working with the symphony and teaching music on the side. Peter and I made a trip to Edmonton to see Harry Pinchin and discussed a lot of the ideas that eventually became the basis for the Westwinds.

Both Rod and I were brass specialists, and Dennis Jackson was an awesome clarinet and saxophone player. We felt that we would be stronger in teaching the woodwind beginners if Dennis was with us. Therefore, we asked him to join us as a co-conductor. This was very important as Dennis was also the Supervisor of Music for Calgary Public Schools and he was able to lend a lot of

support and credibility to our effort. I feel it is important not to ignore his contribution to our beginnings, especially as he died three years ago. After a couple of years with us, he retired and moved to the coast, but he was the third major conductor in those two critical beginning years. He was replaced with Mike Sakatch.

Our final move before starting was to include Lyle Bennet as our business representative for music and instruments. This was important as Lyle spent a lot of money over and above our fees and the Paulson donation in providing us with clinicians and music. He also set up a rental program for all of our beginners. We had a rental night in those days just like the schools.

Rod was also working with a group of alumni students that had taken music at Crescent Heights High School. I believe they were called the Accidental All-Stars. They were not very strong, but they were more advanced than the beginners that we started that first year. I remember clearly that our advertisement program netted 38 brand new members for our first rehearsal. Our tenet, just as it is with the Green Band now, is that a member must be considered a beginner on the instrument he/she was going to play. Peter Paulson for instance, was a very good trumpet player, but started on trombone to meet the beginner requirements. Later on when the bands developed and we had more levels and began accepting players at different levels of ability, Peter switched back to trumpet. The point of this is that Westwinds absorbed the Accidental All-Stars, and our first beginning (Green) band and advanced (Blue) band were the result.

The rest is history. I stayed with Westwinds for eleven years until my restless feet led me elsewhere, but I have remained extremely proud of the success that the organization has made, and I marvel at its development.

Thank you very much with honoring me as a guest conductor and as an originator. I share that effort especially with Rod, Peter, Ildi, Dennis and Lyle. None of it would have happened without their equal vision, support, effort and commitment. I look forward to visiting with all of you in May.