

# **NOTICE**

**Materials in our digital Oral History collections are the products of research projects by several individuals. USF Libraries assume no responsibility for the views expressed by interviewers or interviewees. Some interviews include material that may be viewed as offensive or objectionable. Parents of minors are encouraged to supervise use of USF Libraries Oral Histories and Digital Collections. Additional oral histories may be available in Special Collections for use in the reading room. See individual collection descriptions for more information.**

**This oral history is provided for research and education within the bounds of U.S. Copyright Law (Title 17, U.S.C.). Copyright over Oral Histories hosted by the USF Libraries rests with the interviewee unless transferred to the interviewer in the course of the project. Interviewee views and information may also be protected by privacy and publicity laws. All patrons making use of it and other library content are individually accountable for their responsible and legal use of copyrighted material.**

USF History Oral History Project  
Oral History Program  
Florida Studies Center  
University of South Florida, Tampa Library

Digital Object Identifier: U30-00007  
Interviewee: Mary Dooley (MD)  
Interviewer: Deborah Anderson Silvers (DS)  
Interview date: November 15, 2007  
Interview location: Tampa, Florida  
Transcribed by: Deborah Anderson Silvers  
Transcription date: Unknown  
Audit Edit by: Kimberly Nordon  
Audit Edit date: March 30, 2011  
Final Edit by: Mary Beth Isaacson, MLS  
Final Edit date: March 30, 2011

**Deborah Silvers:** This is Deborah Anderson Silvers. It's November 14, 2007, 10:16 AM. We're in the conference room of the Herd of Thunder Marching Band, and I'm interviewing Mary Dooley, who is the band administrator. And Mary, you know you're being recorded and it's okay with you.

**Mary Dooley:** Yes.

DS: Okay. Can you tell me how you came to USF? And when you came, how far along were the plans for the marching band?

MD: Let's see. How did I come to USF? The first band director, Sid Haton, who was the first band director, needed—the administrator role had just opened up. It was—the administrating part was second. They didn't think about it at first. And then they said, "Uh-oh, we need somebody to do all the logistics," and so they kind of opened up that position after the fact. But he also needed a color guard director.

DS: You fulfilled both?

MD: I fulfilled both, because I'm also a color guard person. So he called me, actually. I was in semi-retirement. (laughs) I had just left a high school—I was there for twelve years—and he knew through other people that I had just resigned from there, so he had asked me to meet with him and do an interview. And then I did an interview with him, and he said he'd be more than happy to—if I would consider the job. And then I met with

Chris Doane, who was the director at the School of Music at the time, and did an interview and filled out the papers.

DS: And this was in ninety-eight [1998], ninety-nine [1999]?

MD: Yeah, the first year of the marching band, the actual first year the marching band started.

DS: Uh-huh. It was ninety-nine [1999], right?

MD: Right. They brought Sid Haton in, though, one year prior to that—not a whole year though. They brought him in in the spring. So, Sid was here in the spring; I came in August, in the beginning of August; and then the band started that fall.

DS: Okay. You know, I know this is a very wide open question, but what was involved in beginning the band?

MD: In the beginning, when I got here, when Sid even got here, plans had already been made. The uniform had already been decided, the colors. The name of the band had already been decided. A lot of things had already been put in place. Chris Doane and Ivan Wansley and Betty Castor were very instrumental in getting that together.<sup>1</sup> They kind of formed a committee together. And Ivan Wansley is the one who picked out the Herd of Thunder name and the Herd of Thunder Marching Band uniform.

DS: Okay.

MD: So, he was the original person for that. So when Sid actually got here, the band director, that had already been decided—and even the color of our instruments, because they decided not to do any gold instruments.

DS: Really?

MD: Right. They decided to go with all silver, which made it interesting because, you know, we have all silver instruments.

---

<sup>1</sup> Betty Castor was also interviewed for the USF History OHP, DOI number U30-00003. She was also interviewed U11-00088, and U23-00026.

DS: You know, I've been watching the band for ten years now and never noticed that.

MD: Yep. All our instruments were, you know, special ordered silver.

DS: Well, that leads me to ask: So the band members who come in, they don't play their own instruments, they play your instruments?

MD: They play our instruments. We have all our brass instruments, and we've just recently, in the last two years, started fulfilling the woodwind instrument area. We just bought ten new tenor saxes. We bought—the year before we bought piccolos. So, we're starting to fill in that area. But as far as brass go, yes, we supply all the brass instruments.

DS: Okay, so like the flute players or the clarinets, they supply their own.

MD: Right.

DS: Which makes sense. They're smaller. Okay, that makes sense.

MD: We hope in the future to be able to supply an instrument for everyone.

DS: Okay, and so that's like an ongoing process.

MD: Buying instruments will be continuous, ongoing, as long as this band is in existence. Because as we buy new ones, the ones—because we're reaching our ten year anniversary next year. Well, those original instruments ten years ago, they need to start being replaced.

DS: What were the first ones that were bought?

MD: The tubas.

DS: Now, is there a difference between a tuba and a sousaphone as far as marching band

goes, or did the tubas play sousaphones?

MD: The tuba—the sousaphone is a tuba. But the tuba is the actual, like—it's the bigger one.

DS: My daughter plays one.

MD: Right, she plays a tuba?

DS: Mm-hm.

MD: It's is the bigger of the instruments.

DS: Okay, so you don't have both. You just have the sousaphone.

MD: No, we have—and that's basically for the looks. Marching band, it looks more impressive to have the big visual. You know, pumps out the sound straight forward. And our tubas—you know, more—usually most marching band tubas do a lot of visuals with the tuba, because it's very big.

DS: Right, and you can put the logo.

MD: You put the logo in it. It's, you know, just more for visual effect.

DS: Oh, okay. That's cool. I didn't know that.

Once that small committee of three made the decisions, was it then delegated to, like, different people, or did you coordinate who got what, or—you know, for instance, instrument acquisition goes over here, uniform goes over here. What goes into the very beginning steps of the band?

MD: Well, the very beginning was developing a budget, and the university decided this is how much budget we're going to have. And Athletics was involved in that, too, because they also help contribute towards the budget.

DS: I didn't know. That's cool.

MD: So, the Athletic Department, the university, Student Government, all those hands kind of came together to put into the budget. So, the budget was created first. And then, once we had the uniform—it was kind of the committee did it all. I mean, we got it, the Mullen Uniform Company came in—they did out three bids to Mullen—did the original uniform. And they did our second uniform that we just got.

DS: Okay.

MD: So, at this point they're—

DS: They are your company.

MD: They are our uniform company. They won the bid. They did the original uniform. The instruments were bid out as well, and Yamaha did our original instruments. They continue to do our fulfilling of our new orders as well. So, Yamaha did the instruments. And Ivan Wansley was really the person who—they kind of gave him that job, to be in charge of all that in the beginning, even before Sid got here. So, he was instrumental in going to the accountant over at the School of Music, who at the time was Jean Cole-Spencer, and going to her and setting up all the POs [purchase orders] that it took. You know, the POs for the instruments, the POs for the uniforms, setting up all that.

And then, Chris Doane was instrumental in getting the lines here. Because the band director line and the administration line, they wanted to have—they wanted to be full-time lines with benefits. So, they were instrumental in having to write the job descriptions for both. And originally—the band administrator job has been altered, because in the beginning they didn't want to incorporate the budget into it. They wanted to keep all the budget handlings through the School of Music. And as they found out after the first three years, that just was such a catastrophe and it didn't work. So, the job description for that person changed.

DS: And it's always been you, though.

MD: It's always been me. It's always been me, so it was an easy change.

DS: Okay. Well, that brings me to the next question. The marching band and the College of Music, in the beginning, was it treated just as an offshoot of the College of Music? I mean, is there—

MD: Evil step-child. (laughs)

DS: That says it all. So, I mean, were there any, like, personnel that crossed over? You know, being married to a musician, I'm very aware of the mindset of classical music is the end-all and be-all. And so, how much can you tell me about the setup of that?

MD: Well, prior to the marching band coming to University of South Florida, the School of Music was just—it was jazz, it was orchestra, it was symphony band, wind ensemble. And then, all of a sudden, you know, a new major ensemble was coming in. And just like anything, people do not embrace change.

DS: Right.

MD: And so, depending on who you ask, some people were very excited, and some people didn't open it with open arms at first. I think that in the beginning it was a little bit more tension. You know, there was definitely a divide, a division. But they did offer the music majors a very good incentive, \$500, to be in the marching band. So that—you know, a lot of music majors the first year did the marching band for that incentive. So, it kind of helped the bridge a little bit. But I would say over the last—and especially since Mike Robinson has been here, the bridge has gotten to be a little bit better. And I think the fit is much more comfortable now.

I've been here for nine years. Mike has been here for—this is, I believe, his fifth year. Our new assistant director has been here—this is his third year. So, you know, the fit is getting better, and we're feeling more comfortable. People over there are getting to know us better. And they're seeing the results that the marching band is benefiting. We see over, you know, a million audience members a year. And with that publicity and with the success of the football, it's going to help in the long run, with recruiting and budgetary items down the road. So, I think the fit is getting more comfortable. In the beginning, just like anything that's new, people have to get used to it.

DS: Right. Well, let me ask you the makeup of the band. What percentage of your band members are actually music majors?

MD: I think we just—I don't want to misquote this, but this is one of the highest years, this year, that we have. And I would have to get back to you on it, because I don't want to misquote—

DS: Oh, I don't need an exact.

MD: I would say it's at least—this year it's between 5 and 10 percent.

DS: Really? To me, that's surprising that it's that low.

MD: Oh, it's low.

DS: But I think it's cool that, you know, that you get so much of a representation of the—

MD: We do. We get a very wide representation. One thing, too, is when you go to other colleges, a lot of other colleges in the Music Ed. Area, they require the students to be at least two years in the marching band. We don't have that requirement here. So, our numbers tend to be a little bit lower.

DS: Which brings up my next question. How is the membership of the marching band—is this like a class that you register for? Do you get credit hours and pay tuition? Or is it, you know, just like a campus organization? You know, how does that fit in?

MD: They did decide in the beginning to make it a class. It's actually Athletic Marching Band. It's a class. And they get—it's really nice. It's how they set it up in the beginning, because we're new and they researched other universities, how they did it. They set it up as a flex credit. So they can take anywhere between one to three credit hours, depending on how they need it to fit in their schedule. But it's the same amount of work for one to three credit hours. Of course you pay more, the more credits you get, but if your schedule needs it they can fulfill it for up to three credit hours. So, it is a class. And just as the Marching Band is a class in the fall, in the spring the Athletic Band, the Pep Band, is also a class. It's University Pep Band. So, the students can take two classes. They can take the fall Marching Band, and then if they are in the Pep Band, they can take the University Pep Band class in the spring.

DS: Now, are those elective credits?



MD: It is elective credit. And it's just—they do pay a lab fee with it. It is elective credit.

DS: That's great. So, that's how you get the broad sampling from across the different majors.

MD: Broad sampling. We have biochemistry majors, we have premed majors, we have—every major in the university, I think, is in the band, which is really neat.

DS: Yeah. So, are these people that have mainly come from high school bands?

MD: Mainly high school bands.

DS: Someone couldn't walk up and say, "I want to be in band."

MD: Oh, anybody at the university can—anybody can join the band in the university. But most of, you know, the students we have already have marching experience, and they already know how to play their instrument, and they come to us and they join the band at this point. The Marching Band, at this point, the only sections who do auditions in this stage of the young career of the band are the auxiliary and the drum line. They do auditions in May to be in the group. The Marching Band has not set auditions yet. We're getting there, though, because as soon as we get our number, which is about 325 to 350, then we will have to cap our numbers and start the audition process to be in it. So, we're almost there.

DS: So right now, somebody can come up and say, "I play a trombone," and they will—

MD: And register for the band.

DS: Wow.

MD: Right.

DS: So that really—that is—

MD: It helped build our numbers. Yes, it helps build our numbers. We're not turning people away, you know. And as our numbers build, and like I said, once we reach that magic number, then we can say, "Okay, now it's by audition."

DS: That's great. Do you see that happening?

MD: Oh, we see it happening next year.

DS: Wow!

MD: Our tenth anniversary.

DS: That's cool. So, how many people were in the first year?

MD: The first year had approximately 220 people. It was a high number. It was a big band the first year: the excitement—you know, everybody was really excited about the band; the \$500 incentive for music majors to come over and be in the band.

DS: That's a pretty good incentive.

MD: It's a good incentive. So, we had a lot of people in the first year of the band: the excitement. Of course, the next year the money went away, and our numbers went down. Ever since then—

DS: By how much do you—I mean, just an approximate figure?

MD: I would say it went down at least 20 percent. They just kept coming down. So, we went from having a real high number, and we kind of went on a slope down until we reached—I think the lowest the band has ever been is about 140 to 150. We've never dropped below that.

DS: Okay.

MD: And then now we're on the—

DS: Upswing

MD: Upswing. And I don't think the band will ever be any smaller than—starting next year, ever be any smaller than 300.

DS: That is good. Now, when you say 300, is that just marching numbers, or does that include, like, the guards and the majorettes?

MD: That's total marching number. It includes everybody: winds, auxiliary, percussion.

DS: Is there a formula that says a marching band should have X number of tubas, X number of trombones, X number of majorettes?

MD: There is a formula, to a certain degree. Auxiliary, you can have large auxiliary, you know, as long as it's not too large, and it looks—it needs to look balanced. As far as the band goes, they will start capping, you know, more the woodwind numbers. Right now we allow HCC students and all community college students into the marching band. But as we grow and we have to start capping our numbers and capping our sections, we'll also have to start capping the number of HCC and community college students that we let into the program. And we'll give the first choice of course to the students that go to USF.

DS: Makes sense. Makes absolutely perfect sense. And so, do you recruit from high schools at all, or is it totally incentive from students?

MD: It's all of it. We recruit heavy from high school, especially the freshmen coming in; we feel like if we can get them their freshmen year, hopefully they'll stay with us through their senior year. So, we do recruit every year. We do at least one to two exhibitions a year, where we go out and we'll go to a marching band contest where we don't compete, but we just do exhibition.

DS: Okay.

MD: And we go to the exhibition and we perform at the end in hopes to, you know,

recruit some of the high school seniors that will be at the show that day. And we go around to other shows. The shows we go to, we always have a recruiting booth there, and they set up and they're there for the whole day. You know, kids come by and we give out our information, our flyers. In addition, we make a poster every year, a recruiting poster, and we send it to every high school in Florida.

DS: And then the band directors will put it up on their boards.

MD: The band directors put it on their boards. And you know, we've gotten a lot of kids that way. So, we're very fortunate. And the popularity of the football helps a lot.

DS: Oh, yes, it does. (laughs) Well, let's see. Did all of the components of a marching band, did they all come together at once from that committee? Or did you start on, like, the band and add the rest of the stuff as it was feasible? Or was it all feasible from the beginning?

MD: It was all feasible from the beginning. Right from the beginning, it was a full band. It had—the only thing that we've added since the beginning are featured twirlers.

DS: Really?

MD: That's the only thing we've added, and that was three years ago. But we do not have a majorette line, we just have featured twirlers. So, we want them to be the best in the state, and we audition them as if, you know, the best in the state featured twirlers. And we've added featured twirlers this year: we have three, and, that will probably be the highest number we'll ever have of the featured twirlers. But in the very beginning, the color guard, the flags, the rifles, the sabers, and the band, everybody started at the same time. All the components were thought about in the beginning to start.

DS: Tell me about the very first day of band practice, the first day when you had all of your pieces in line, and whoosh, here come the students.

MD: Well, the first day—the first day was crazy. I have to admit, the very first day of marching band practice, like when we went to the field, we really didn't start until a good forty-five minutes to an hour after rehearsal started because we had so many kids late. And the funny part about it is—the kids kept showing up, and they were saying “We were lost. We were lost.” And the general comments were, “We kept asking people where the marching band practice is,” and every student they asked said, “We have a marching

band?” (both laugh) That was—we got tickled after a while, because that was always the response. “We have a marching band?” And that—really, that stayed with us for a good three to four years. “Oh, USF has a marching band?” So, that was—that’s definitely been a thought process that has changed on campus. Pretty much everybody on campus knows now we have a marching band. But that was funny, because we had a lot of people late, and they were trying to get directions to our field. Our original field was where we practice now—it was over some—and we were the only field out there at the time, right next to the Alumni Center.

DS: Right.

MD: It was a beautiful field. And it was fenced in, and it had—I mean, the grass was like carpet. They groomed it, they groomed it. It was beautiful, and it was just our field. We got to shut the gate, lock it, and only the marching band was on that field. But since then, that field has been torn up, and Athletic Department got a new building. Those intramural fields had to be moved somewhere, so they got moved over to where we are. So, they tore our field up and they made numerous intramural fields there. And so now we’re just part of that, so we don’t have our own field.

But where we are now will not be our final resting ground, either. I’m sure we’ll be moved again. And at some point we would like to have our own marching band field, because—for the purpose of the tower that the director stands on. We have to rent one. We have to rent one every year, and it’s very expensive. The cost that we rent one in one year, we could build the nicest tower of any marching band. And we’ve rented them for nine years, just to give you an estimate of how much that we’ve spent on renting a lift.

DS: That’s what—is that thing portable?

MD: Yes, it’s portable, and it goes up. But they will not allow us, where our field is, to have a permanent structure, because it’s beautification and it’s Fowler Avenue in front.

DS: Oh, so it would be a mountain of paperwork and approvals. Oh, my.

MD: And we know that’s not our final place that that’s going to be our field, so we don’t want to build this huge beautiful tower and have to move in two years or three years down the road.

DS: Right, that makes sense.

MD: Sort of.

DS: But that first day of practice, that mass confusion. How did you start? Did you break people into sections?

MD: Yep. Yeah, everybody came in. We had graduate assistants already assigned. The Marching Band from the very beginning has had three graduate assistants, positions. We had field tech people. We had the marching band director. We had a drum instructor. We had myself, the guard instructor. So, every area had a person.

DS: Who was recruited from outside?

MD: Recruited from outside. Nobody was here prior to—nobody came over from another area. None of the faculty came over. Everybody started—everybody on the staff the first year were brand new people coming into the organization.

DS: How was that? Was that exciting?

MD: It was exciting. You know, it was a lot of people getting to know each other. So, you know, everybody was new. So, everything we did was experimental, because everything was new. Even the drum majors, we had to wait until everybody met, and then we had drum major auditions because there was—you know, we couldn't have any rules like you have to be in the band ten years before you, you know, try out for drum major.

DS: Why?

MD: Because there was never a marching band prior to that. And the first year we did have five drum majors. We had five.

DS: Did you have to have five (inaudible)?

MD: They took turns. They took turns.

DS: And so, for instance, the drum majors that you selected, they had high school experience?

MD: They had high school experience, right. They were probably, you know, the main drum major in their high school.

DS: Oh, okay.

MD: So, they did have experience. But now, you know, you have to be in the marching band for at least a year. You need to be in a leadership position, because the drum major is a leader of the band. So, now we can have requirements.

DS: You can have requirements. I heard about those. (both laugh)

MD: But it was fun. It was mass confusion. When we first got together, everybody went into their sections and we rehearsed for about an hour prior to all coming together. And then we all came together, it was like wow. Everybody was new. You know, how we read drill charts. You know, how Sid got—the first band director, Sid, got up on the podium and directed the rehearsal. Everything was new. So, we just waited for instructions on how everything should go.

DS: And he was the one that made the final—you know, the ultimate, this is how we're going to bring it all together?

MD: Right. He's the director, and he would run the rehearsal from the tower, once all the components had individually rehearsed, bring it together, and start on the field. And at that point, all the individual instructors go around and help, but the director will run the rehearsal. And he did. And it all came together. Lots of pictures were taken, lots of cameras going.

DS: If you happen to have one, I would love to have one.

MD: I can probably pull one up. They're on a post-it board in our archives.

DS: That would be great.

MD: And our first show was a Latin show, which we've stayed with that theme. Every year we do a Spanish/Latin show. And since the very beginning, we did it and it kind of stuck. And it's great for this area and it works well.

DS: It's perfect for this area.

MD: And that was our very first show.

DS: Planned that way?

MD: It was planned that way.

DS: That is great. So, when you guys were getting together and planning for that initial season and everything, were you—since you were starting from scratch, did that give you a lot of latitude to bring in new ideas, things that you might have always wanted to try, or did you try to stick with a formula?

MD: Well, it was really up to the first band director, what our style was going to be. I mean, he really set what our style was going to be. He could have come in and whatever style he said, that's what we were. And what was really neat is that we have no traditions at this point. So we have nobody who has, you know, "Well, this is the way the band's always done it, and we don't have to change anything." So, everything we introduce is going to be "That's how it is," with changes along the way.

So, the first band director decided that our style basically was going to be more of a contemporary style, more of what they call a drum corps type style, marching and playing. We've kind of stuck through that, with a little bit of variation. We've stayed with that style from the beginning, that—you know, that our auxiliary components were going to be a little bit more contemporary and they were going to do more of the modern type auxiliary work. And we've stuck with that, and it's worked well. And our audience has no problem with it, because that's what they've known from the beginning. Where, you know, you go out to a lot of these big SEC schools, they want to move a little bit more into this century and get a little more updated. But they fight terribly with the alumni and the boosters, because they're like, "No, the majorettes have to wear those ankle boots, because that's how it's always been." And we don't have that, and that was one of the really neat things, starting a brand new marching band: we brought the style in that we wanted everybody to know that this is USF, from the beginning.



DS: That's cool now. So, that decision was made by the band director?

MD: The band director.

DS: As opposed to that initial committee of three before you got there.

MD: Right, right. Now, the initial committee decided what instrument color was going to be, the uniform design, the name of the band. But the band director, he's the one who decided what is our style going to be.

DS: That's very cool. And you know, when you were deciding that and everything, was part of that decision that we are a newer college, and we can take into—you know, we have no traditions, so let's start them.

MD: Right. It was taken in. It was basically where—you know, college bands, not that all of them go that way, because you have your very traditional type marching bands, you have your FAMU type style marching bands, you have your Big Ten type marching bands, and we decided that this was going to be our style marching band.

DS: And started from scratch.

MD: Right, started from scratch.

DS: That is so cool. Tell me, are there—were there, at the very beginning, moments that you can say “Well, we can laugh about it now,” but at the time you wanted to pull your hair out?

MD: Oh, you know, there was probably so many I should have written them down. (both laugh) Well, a lot of it was not necessarily on the field, it was behind the scenes.

DS: Right.

MD: “Oh, we have a marching band now. No, we don't march parades. We're not a high school band.” One of the probably biggest ones that we just wanted to pull our hair out,

was that they wanted us to march parades second semester. We kept saying, “Well, second semester, the marching band doesn’t meet. We’re done first semester.” Well, it was probably 19—maybe 2000, 2000. They were very—you know, “You will—you have to march the Gasparilla Parade. You have to bring the band back.” And we’re like “Well, there need to be incentives.” So, they actually scholarshipped everybody in the band to come back second semester. They paid for uniform cleaning. And we actually marched the Gasparilla Parade one time.

DS: One time!

MD: One time! It was such a big expense they decided never to do it again. But we tried to warn them it was going to be a big expense to bring the marching band back a second semester. So, I mean, those kind of things. It was basically internal, getting used to, “There’s a marching band, this is what we have to do.” Like I said, in the beginning my job description changed tremendously, that I wasn’t going to be in charge of the budget. But then by third year, I was in charge of the budget. So, you know, a lot of things they kind of said, “Oh, this is how it works. Oh, no, we need to do this.” So, it was all trial and error for a good three years.

DS: How much of that did you learn on the job?

MD: Everything. There was no job description when I got here. So, everything I learned, I’ve just—it’s been, you know, from the beginning.

DS: By doing it.

MD: By doing it, right! So, everything has been—I’ve been trained by USF. And you know, all the financial programs change every year.

DS: At least.

MD: So, everything I’ve done is just training.

DS: So, who did the initial choreography?

MD: Of the band?

DS: Uh-huh.

MD: The band director. He actually wrote the music and wrote the drill.

DS: Really?

MD: Yeah, he did. Yep. That was his gig and he liked to do it, so he actually did it all. He had some help in some of the marching band areas, but he overall did the choreography and the general theme. In the color guard area, my choreographer is Michael James, and he has been here ever since the beginning. So, we've had a consistent style from the very beginning.

DS: So with the choreography and everything, how does that change from year to year? Do you have certain formations that you, like, re-assemble from one set to another, or do you start from scratch every year? Or, you know, I know—every year, do you do three completely different sets? And how are those organized and assembled?

MD: The only thing that stays the same from year to year is pre-game. Pre-game is the same drill sets and songs every year. That's tradition. We've made our pre-game, doesn't change. So, every year we run out of the tunnel in the beginning of the show and we do pre-game. That doesn't change. However, we do three shows. We have usually six home games, and we rotate shows every third game. So, we do three home shows. Those shows, those sets change every year. So, we start from scratch. Every year it's a new show, new drill, new music, new routines. Everything is new.

DS: And that is decided upon by Dr. Robinson?

MD: By Dr. Robinson. He decides—he has the overall decision on what our shows are going to be. He asks the students and he sends out emails, and he makes a long, long list of show ideas. He says, "Give me your show ideas," and they send in all these crazy show ideas. And he goes, "Okay, now"—he makes a list of them and he goes "Now, vote." And he takes like the top ten and he goes "Vote again." And he narrows it down. And when they—to areas, so if they want to do jazz or pop or rock. And then he decides what the music's going to be at that point.

DS: Okay.

MD: On the top three shows. So the students have, you know, a say to a certain degree on where the stylistic—where the shows are going to be.

DS: That's cool. Now, is that a new—is that a USF thing?

MD: That's a Dr. Robinson thing.

DS: 'Cause I was going to say, I don't think a lot of colleges give that much input.

MD: No. Dr. Robinson, he lets the students have input in that area.

DS: I gotta ask. My all-time favorite show was the *Thriller* one. (laughs)

MD: That's a lot of people's all-time favorite. We did a big recruiting event down in Orlando with that show, and I think we won a lot of students over that year, with that show.

DS: That was awesome.

MD: Yeah. A lot of people liked the *Thriller* show.

DS: Was that a Dr. Robinson invention as well?

MD: Well, you know, Dr. Robinson, along with our grad assistant, Keith Sands, wrote all the music for that show.

DS: Wow!

MD: And then Stephen Alia wrote the drill for it.

DS: Okay, so just about all the routines and everything are in-house?

MD: Yeah, to a certain degree. You know, our drill writer is out of house, and like I said, the color guard person is out of house. But they've been with us for so long that we feel like they are in-house.

DS: They know you.

MD: Right.

DS: They absolutely know you. Tell me about the first time the Herd of Thunder Marching Band took the field. Tell me, like, from say two hours before the game, or the day of the game. You know, tell me about it.

MD: Well, it was real exciting. We had a Friday night rehearsal, as we always do the day before the game, and we had so many people come to that rehearsal. It was really neat, because it felt very collegiate, having so many people come the night before a game to watch the marching band rehearsal, which happens at, you know, a lot of schools that have traditional type marching bands where they've been established for many years. And we actually had that. That was real exciting for the students, because—

DS: Now, was that at Ray Jay, or was it here?

MD: No, it was here at practice the day before. So, we had a very wall thick of people watching the last, you know, quote unquote "rehearsal" before the big showing. And that was real exciting. And you know, *The Oracle* came out. Everybody wanted to, you know, get in on the action, so to speak. So, that was very exciting—the day before. And then, Saturday, game day, it was exciting. But just on the way down to Raymond James Stadium—we take charter buses. We meet here and take charter buses down to Raymond James Stadium. The skies got a little grey, and we were like, "Oh, no." And just sure enough, the band director turned around to me and he looked and goes, "There's one plan that we didn't plan for." And I said, "Yeah." And he goes, "That would be rain." I said, "Yeah." He said, "The original people, they didn't buy raincoats." So, in the bid, in the beginning, there was no raincoat bid.

DS: Is there now?

MD: Yes. Yes, there is. But we didn't have raincoats in the beginning. So, we weren't

prepared for rain. (laughs) And we get to the stadium and it's very exciting. And you know, everybody's really, you know, excited. And actually, that was probably—even though we have a bigger attendance at games, that was probably the most people I've ever seen in the stands prior to the game starting.

DS: Really?

MD: Because that's one area that we haven't quite gotten there yet. Get into the stands for pre-game. Our fans haven't quite gotten there yet. But on that day, they were there because they wanted to see the Marching Band, which was really neat. And from that very first game, we ran out of the tunnels, and that's how we made our pre-game different. They wanted it to be like, you know, a herd coming out, running on, you know, the bulls running onto the field. And we did the two-tunnel entrance. So, that tradition established from the very beginning. And we ran out.

Now, pre-game has changed. The actual pre-game has changed slightly with the new director coming in. He changed up, but he kept a lot of the same traditions that we had, like running of the bull. And certain things he didn't change, that were traditions already started. He was very good. When he came in, he assessed all the traditions that had already started. He kept all the ones he felt like they were the important ones, and then he started new ones as well.

So, that day was very exciting. But just sure as we finished pre-game, it started raining. And it was one of those good Florida rains. It never stopped. And it wasn't just a rain, it was a pouring downpour. But it didn't damper the band's spirits any. They played and played and played in the stands. But, unfortunately, they weren't able to take the field again.

DS: Oh, no! (laughs)

MD: So, they were scared that we might hurt the field. So, that was okay. That was all right, because we had a good time. We never left the stands. We played through the downpour.

DS: And that was the old stadium then?<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> DS is referring to Tampa Stadium/Houlihan's Stadium where the Bulls played until Raymond James Stadium opened in 1998.

MD: And we won, and actually—which was really important, I feel—on that day, we won a fan base on that day. Because they were like, “Wow, the Band stayed in the stands and they played and played and played until the very end.” And it poured rain, poured. Without a raincoat, they stayed in those stands and played to the very end of the game.

And we got so many emails, and just, you know, just how impressed they were that the band held out and played through the rain and what a great addition it was, and just proud, proud alumni. And ever since then, we’ve had a very good relationship with our Alumni Department. And I think since that very first game when we sat in the rain and we played through it, I think that’s what established it.

DS: But you didn’t get to take the field.

MD: We didn’t get to take the field. For pre-game we did.

DS: Now that was the old stadium, right?

MD: No, we were always at Raymond James.

DS: Always at Ray Jay.

MD: Always at Raymond James.

DS: I can’t remember when it opened.

MD: The football team was at the old stadium. But that’s when they—before the Marching Band was developed and they hired high school bands to come perform.

DS: I remember that. It’s so cool. So, you actually got to take the field the second—

MD: For pre-game. For the second show—

DS: For the second game you got to do—

MD: We got to do our show. And it didn't rain.

DS: So, how did it feel when they first got out? Were you nervous?

MD: Everybody was a little bit nervous, 'cause everything was new, you know, but it went fine. We didn't fall apart. And ever since, the Herd of Thunder has represented very well from the very beginning, and it's only gotten stronger every year.

DS: Is it the Herd of Thunder or is it the Athletic Department, for instance, that determines, you know, when the band comes out on the field for the players to run through? How much does the Athletic Department have input into where the band is and what they do at what times?

MD: Well, we have timing. The Athletic Department tells us what time we need to be down on the tunnel. Certain games, like this game coming up is Senior Night and they're bringing in parachute jumpers, so, you know, our timing has changed. We have to take a little bit out of pre-game to get to the tunnel a little bit sooner. Every Monday there is an Athletic meeting prior to a game. And that's where everybody sits at a table and we learn what we need to do that game. You know, what's our timing going to be? When do we need to start? Where do we need to be?

And one little interesting fact that a lot of people don't know is that tunnel that we run out of right now was not the original tunnel. Coach [Jim] Leavitt—it was supposed to be the other tunnel, the same side but the other tunnel. That was supposed to be our original tunnel, which we had practiced for that tunnel, for the team to run out of that tunnel. But on game day, Coach Leavitt had a vision of some sort that made him nervous and he didn't want to run out of that tunnel. So, he switched it to the other tunnel, where we all scrambled and we moved to the other tunnel. He's very superstitious, and for some reason he didn't like that tunnel. There's something wrong with that tunnel; I'm not sure what exactly the reason is. But we all switched to the other tunnel. And that's the tunnel we've run out ever since. So, that's our tunnel.

DS: That's interesting. That is very interesting. Let's see, where am I? Well, one thing I wanted that occurred to me is with the new band, when actually do you do, for instance, competition season? Do you do that? And is it during the same semester as the marching season?

MD: The marching band doesn't compete.



DS: Okay.

MD: We don't compete at all. It's not a—this is just college marching band. We go to competitions and we do exhibitions. But the marching band does not compete. Second semester, there's different components that come out of the marching band. We have a winter drum line and a winter guard. Now, those components do go out and they—there's different circuits for them. And those components are basically for recruiting. We do recruit for the drum line with that group, we recruit for the winter guard second semester. Those organizations do do competitions. It's part of what they call WGI, Winter Guard International, and Percussion International, and they actually do do those circuits. So, those component groups do compete second semester. But as far as the marching band in general, we're not a competition band. So, we just are there for entertainment purposes only.

DS: Okay. Let me ask you, now that the football team is getting bigger and more recognized and everything, what does this mean for the band? For instance, travel. Will the band be going more? And you know, what are the logistics for that? I know it requires transportation, transportation of instruments, podiums—

MD: Well, it does. The popularity of the football team, it will help the marching band—not only with recruiting, it will help our numbers. We know that. We know that this will be a boost. And that's why I don't think the Marching Band will ever fall behind under 300, because I think our football team is only going to be better and bigger and stronger. And that will make the marching band—will dictate that as well.

As far as travel goes, you know, it's still new. I mean everybody's kind of entering into the Big East—what, three years ago [2005]? And now we're, you know—now all of a sudden we're going to travel more. And it's something that the Athletic Department has to get used to, you know? And they have to budget for it, you know. This year—

DS: So, that's under the Athletic Department?

MD: Athletic. The Athletic Department pays for the marching band travel.

DS: Oh, okay.

MD: So, whatever they decide they want us to go to, they pay for. And so like, right now, as soon as marching band season ends, we will meet with the Athletic Department and we'll discuss next year. Okay, where do you want to commit the marching band to going? How much money are you going to commit to it? And it's new, and it's trial and error. As time goes on, we will travel more. And eventually what we really want to see is the Athletic Department committing to the marching band two full band trips away, and everything else is a pep band, anything further. You know, so every game there's representation of music.

DS: The Pep Band. Does one usually go with the—?

MD: No, no, not at this point. That travel hasn't happened yet. But we do see that in the future. So, at this point we don't fly anywhere. The only thing we've done is bus.

DS: Okay, so I know at Florida Atlantic [University]—

MD: Right, we bus. We bused. So, you know, logistically, we just had to set up hotel rooms, the buses, the per diems, you know—and it's a lot to set up for 300 people. But we haven't had to set up yet a flight for 300 people, because we haven't flown anywhere. We haven't quite gotten to that point yet. We will be there, though.

DS: Yes. That's the thing with the Big East, everything seems so far away.

MD: Everything is far away. So, you know, that's why every year we need to look at the schedule and decide what is the closest game that we can take a full band trip. You know, besides a bowl game.

DS: Now, bowl games. I've been to all of them. The band's been there.

MD: Right, and they've committed the band being there to every bowl game. As long as it's in driving distance, we will go. If it's something like, let's say, the International Bowl, where it's in [Toronto] Canada, they will not take a full marching band. They will take a pep band. They cannot—they wouldn't be able to afford for the full marching band to fly to a bowl game at this point. If it was a BCS bowl, they would be able to.

DS: Definitely. But I mean, like, for instance, say the International Bowl, because it's one of the things I'm running into with my own arrangements. Would you, as the logistic

person, literally tear your hair out at the thought of passports, for instance?

MD: Yes. Just the fact of converting the money, the nightmare of the—because one thing the university does, and I said it in the very beginning, we change—the university changes its systems every year. Well, travel module has just changed, and so the traveling is very hard now. You have to input everything into computer, and it's still in test mode right now. But I just hope that that module does not come out until after the bowl game, just in case we do travel to Canada, because logistically that will be very hard to set up. But we'll manage. But it will be—from the logistics end of it, it will be much harder converting the money and the plane ticket and the passports, and do you need a passport and do you not need a passport?

DS: Actually, I know the answer to that. If you're going by plane, you need a passport. If you're going by train, bus or boat, you can get by with a driver's license and birth certificate.

MD: Okay. Well, that will be the logistical nightmare there. So, yeah, we—I mean, where the International Bowl would be exciting, as a full organization and staff, we hope that it's going to be somewhere close, where not only the full band can travel but our fan base can travel, because that is just better for everybody. So, that's what we hope for.

DS: Now, how does that work, 'cause by the time the bowl game happens, school's out. Your band members disperse.

MD: They do. But what we do in the very beginning—and this was trial and error, too, because this came after the first bowl appearance.

DS: Oh, the one in Charlotte?<sup>3</sup>

MD: Yeah. We put it in the course syllabus the second year, that we put it—because anything in the syllabus is your class. Well, we put in there, “These are all your possible bowls. Do not make plans during this time until we know what bowl you're going to, because your grade will be affected.” You know, this is part of your class. We didn't have that put in there the first year. So the second year, just like I said, all trial and error, because everything is—you know, we do a lot of firsts, a lot of firsts here. And so, you know, that was our first bowl. So we knew the second year what logistics we need to put in place for the students to make sure that we have full representation.

---

<sup>3</sup> DS is referring to the Meineke Car Care Bowl.

DS: Now, do they have to get there on their own, or do, like, they all have to come to one point and ride a bus?

MD: We travel by bus. We travel by bus. I know that in other organizations, other band programs, if somebody's in Oklahoma and they're home for Christmas, they will fly them back to wherever they need to be. We don't have too many of those people who are really, really far away yet. I'm sure as time goes on—

DS: Nobody in Toronto.

MD: As time goes on and the Bulls get bigger, I'm sure that will be something that will happen with USF, too. You know, we're going to have to fly students in. We do put them up in hotel rooms, because the dorms do close. And if we are asking them to be here for rehearsal and to stay for a certain amount of time, we do supply hotel rooms for the students that need to stay.

DS: Okay, and what about the instruments? How do they get from here to there?

MD: Well, since we're now busing only, we actually have a Ryder truck that's donated to us by a very nice alumni. And he donates the truck to us for the whole season, actually. He gives us a very nice donation of a truck, and we take that truck wherever we need to take it.

DS: That's cool. Speaking of alumni, let me ask you, high school bands are generally organized and financed with parent/band booster associations. Does the Herd of Thunder have anything like that? Or is it alumni, band alumni, alumni associations?

MD: Well, high school bands, they have band/parent organizations for fundraising, basically for the needs of money. And since we have a budget supplied to us and they're in college, we do not have a parent organization or parent base. Which is really exciting this year is that we are starting our first alumni organization this year. It's new, and it's still in the development stages. But this is our first year that we have solicited alumni to start joining the Herd of Thunder Marching Band and coming back. The assistant director is mainly in charge of the alumni portion of the organization right now, and we have our first president. They are starting to get all the bylaws together and stuff like that. So, we hope by this time next year, the group is fully developed and a running organization.

DS: What do you anticipate its purpose being?

MD: Its purpose is going to be—it's basically just like any alumni association: to be there for support, both spiritually and financially in the long run. You know, right now, we're not going to see that. But in the long run—well, you know, in 100 years, there's going to be somebody from this alumni association who's going to want to give back to the Herd of Thunder.

DS: Right.

MD: You know. And everything helps. We're thinking ahead. Like I said in the beginning, we're here temporarily; the marching band's going to be here forever. So, we're setting it up now for the future.

DS: That's awesome. That's good. Which brings me, actually, to my final question. The band's been in existence for a decade now. How far do you think the program has come, and where do you see the band in the next five years or the next twenty years?

MD: Well, since I've been here from the beginning, I can tell you that the band has come a very long way, not only in size, but musically, visually. The whole program has grown tremendously. And it's very exciting because I only see it getting better. And, that's really neat. And, you know, in its small time of existence, it's already one of the better marching bands in the state of Florida, which is really neat because we don't have that 100 years of tradition behind us. We have almost ten. So, you think, if we've done this much in ten years, what are we going to do in the next ten years? Which makes it very exciting how this program's just going to get better, bigger, stronger. Our alumni association's going to be there; it's going to get bigger and stronger. You know, our fan base is stronger. The team is going to be stronger.

So, I envision this band, like I said in the beginning, never dropping below 300 and probably capping out somewhere between 350-375 and always being that strong; and always being every year, when everybody sees the Herd of Thunder, you're going to get the same product every single year, being a consistent, just strong marching band.

DS: Thank you. That is awesome.

*End of interview*