



INSPIRING THE NEXT GENERATION WITH HEATHER SHRUMP

By Trudy Horsting

Heather's Beginnings in the Arts

Heather Shrump started dance lessons when she was just three years old. In the 4th grade, she began learning how to play the flute. "Ever since I was little, art and dance have been a passion. I love drawing, scrapbooking, or just playing music and dancing." The arts have truly made Heather who she is today.

In junior high, she auditioned for a pom-pom squad, which performed at sports games and pep rallies. She says, "I just loved music and dance. I was already in the band, but the thought of performing in front of people was of great interest to me." Soon after making the team, the school decided to turn the pom-pom squad into a color guard. Heather says, "I decided I was going to give it a try, and I immediately loved it. Thus began my love for the marching arts."



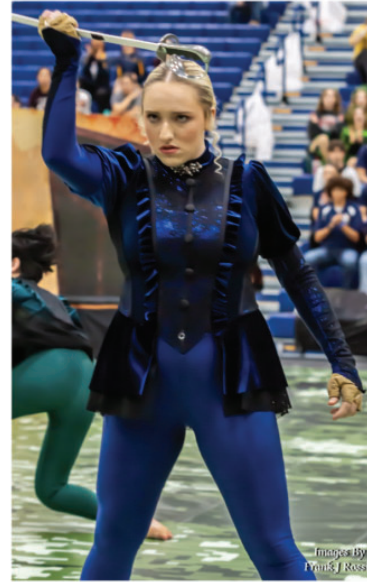
Immediately after graduating high school in 1986, Heather began her career as a color guard instructor. She says, “My high school instructor asked me to come back and help teach after I graduated. I immediately agreed and have been instructing ever since.”

Heather has spent most of her color guard career as an instructor at Norwin High School, where she has been for 27 years. She says, “I came to Norwin in 1996 after meeting my husband, who was a marching instructor for the marching band.” She has been the Director of the Norwin High School color guard for about nine years.

Heather explains how her upbringing shaped her marching arts journey and who she is as an instructor today. “Through school, my parents always made grades a priority. I learned quickly that details are important, and that time management is the key to it all. I think those are things I still carry with me today.” Heather’s mind is always mulling over creative possibilities present in the details she witnesses every day. She says, “I could be watching a movie and hearing a song, and I immediately ask myself if I could use that song in the winter. Or I watch a TV show and figure out how I can incorporate it into a show. I’m pretty sure the first thought that comes to mind anytime I see something artsy is how can I use that in winter guard.”

Rewarding Moments at Norwin

Heather speaks to many rewarding moments throughout her marching arts career. However, one that stands out in particular was the year that Norwin moved to World Class. “I had been with Norwin through many years in A and Open class, but I never imagined that we would be a World Class color guard competing with the best high school color guards in the country,” Heather says.



“It is still so surreal that we are here.”

Norwin became the first World program in Western Pennsylvania. Heather explains, “Norwin is from an area where the marching arts are not as prominent as they are in Ohio, Florida, Texas, and California. Becoming the first World program here is something that I will always be proud of.” However, it wasn’t simply about making it to World class. Heather describes, “It was so rewarding becoming a world-class program, but it has been just as rewarding sustaining it for the last 14 years.”

Nevertheless, Heather says that what is the most rewarding of all is watching her students excel every day. “Watching them push themselves and grow every single day is inspiring and incredibly fulfilling. That moment they achieve something they have been working on so hard and watching their face just light up is everything

I need and, honestly, the reason I love what I do.” Heather continues, “Watching them achieve a level they never thought possible never gets old.”

Heather recognizes that, as a director, she has the potential to influence the lives of the younger generation every day. She says, “Being a director and having the opportunity to influence young adults is such an honor. Whether you are a male or female educator, just giving your time to these young, impressionable performers is life-changing.”



Honoring Women’s History Month

Reminiscing on the headway women have made throughout history, Heather is proud of the progress and contributions of women both in this activity and in more general terms. “When you look through history, it continues to amaze me the strides women have made. From women not being permitted to vote to a woman running for president, it is incredible what women have done both in the marching arts and the business/political world. Knowing that women are continuing to break barriers every single day makes me proud.”

Heather continues, “I have never been one to stereotype, so I don’t really look at things from a gendered perspective. I like to look at what each person brings to the table. However, given where this world was

over 150 years ago, it's hard not to stand tall and be proud to be a woman."

Today, Heather loves having the opportunity to inspire the next generation of both men and women alike. "Color guard is about so much more than flags on a floor," She says, "I always tell my students that yes, I want your flags to go around together, and yes, I want you to catch your weapons, but what I care about more is that you leave this program more confident and stronger than you came in. That, to me, is the most powerful gift you can give your students."



Learning From/As Instructors

Heather encourages other instructors to always strive to continue to improve for their students. It is critical never to become complacent in one's teaching. She says, "Never stop learning and paying attention. I have been teaching for over 36 years, and I continue to learn every single day. I learn not only from the people that I am blessed to work with at Norwin, but also from the students themselves. I have been fortunate to have been around some of the greatest minds in this activity, and I have learned from every one of them."

Like each of us, Heather was inspired by her own instructors over the years. Heather speaks of three individuals in particular who influenced her journey as an educator. First, she speaks of Michael Gaines, who was the designer at Norwin when the team first entered World Class.

Heather says, “To watch him work was so powerful. His calm demeanor and approach to design are amazing. He could move people around a gym so easily, and just when you began to ask yourself what was happening, he would run a chunk, and it would be magical. I was so honored to be able to watch him work.” Heather continues, “He is also one of the humblest people I have ever met. He is truly one of a kind.”

Secondly, Heather speaks of Brady Sanders. She says, “Brady was on staff at Norwin for many years. The way he taught the students was incredible. His patience and his approach to teaching were inspiring. He had a way of getting through to every student he taught. He seemed to always know what each student needed to hear, and he never hesitated to give them as much information as possible. He is one of the best educators I have ever been around.” Heather emphasizes, “He made me want to be a better educator.”



Thirdly, Heather is continuously inspired by Joe Heining. She says, “Joe has been Norwin’s designer for the last seven years. Joe is easily one of the most creative minds in the activity. He not only stages the shows, but he also choreographs and creates most of the moments. It’s rare in this activity to have someone do both.” Heather continues, “The way he looks at things is very different from the other designers I’ve seen, and that is so refreshing. He is a brilliant mind, and I am honored to have him at Norwin.”

Heather encourages all instructors to remember the most important parts of the activity every day as they enter their rehearsals. First, she reiterates how critical it is to have an open mind and continue to learn from all those you interact with. Additionally, she says, “Always remember that you don’t need medals and trophies to be successful or make a difference. Anytime you make a difference in a student’s life, you have succeeded.”

For Heather, the most important aspect of her job is improving the lives of the students she interacts with each day. Heather says, “I do not consider myself one of the most influential people or women in this activity, but I do hope I am one of the most influential people in my students’ lives.”

About the Author:

Trudy Horsting is a graduate student at Arizona State University pursuing her Ph.D. in Political Science. She holds a MA in Political Science from ASU as well as a BA in Political Science and a BA in Writing, Rhetoric, and Technical Communication from James Madison University. While at JMU, she was a four year member and two year captain of the Marching Royal Dukes Color guard and JMU Nuance Winter guard. She was a member of First Flight World Winter guard in 2019 and FeniX Independent World Winter guard in 2020.
