

## The Duquesne University Tamburitians – Passionately Preserving History through Performance

Do you know what a Tamburitian is? Can you even pronounce it (tam-bur-it-z-un)? If you live in Pittsburgh, you're probably very familiar with the name. That's because the Duquesne University Tamburitians, America's longest-running multicultural song and dance company, has been entertaining the region, country and world for nearly 70 years.

Founded in 1937 by Dr. A. Lester Pierce, his former "Slavonic Tamburitza Orchestra" consisted of twelve young men who played the tamburitza – a traditional, mandolin-like Eastern European stringed instrument from which the now-called Tamburitians derive their name.

Pierce's decision to move the group from Texas to Pittsburgh and establish a relationship with Duquesne University gave this city a truly distinctive and enduring artistic tradition. Today, nearly 40 young men and women continue to preserve the music, songs, dances and heritage of Eastern and Central European folk cultures.

Affectionately called the "Tammies" by the Duquesne community, the Tamburitians' performances are a vibrant, living historical documentary which pulsate with sound, color and amazing movement.

Although they perform on the same level as professional musicians and dancers, the Tamburitians are actually comprised of full-time Duquesne University students from all over the globe.

These talented young people receive grant and scholarship consideration towards their education, but this is not their only reward, and many of them are not even studying theater or music. They get to travel the country, making life-long friendships and bonds, as well as experience the sheer exhilaration and joy of performing and bringing smiles to appreciative audiences everywhere.

Paul Stafura has been Managing Director of the Tamburitians for over 12 years, but he has been involved with them for 37 years. Stafura said that the purpose of the group is two-fold: "One is to give deserving students an opportunity to attend a first-rate school like Duquesne. The other is to perpetuate the cultures of Eastern Europe and its surrounding neighbors."

Many people immigrated to Pittsburgh from these regions, and Stafura noted that there is great entertainment and historical value in their music and cultures. But since the fall of communism, these countries are opening up to change. Said Stafura, "It is possible that groups like the Tamburitians may be one of the last resources available to preserve these cultures. We are an entertainment museum on stage."



Brian O'Boyle, a McCandless native and graduate of North Allegheny High School, is currently a junior at Duquesne University, finishing his Bachelor's Degree in Music Technology. Having performed with the Tamburitians for three years, Brian describes himself as an "all-around musician." His instruments include bass, trumpet, accordion and button box.

For years, Brian has loved traditional European music and dance. In high school he was looking for a group in which to



play the accordion and found the McKees Rocks-based band, Slavjane. He has been performing and loving this type of music ever since. Said Brian, "I want to keep [this music] around. It's not like anything else in this country."

With 80-90 performances a year, one may wonder how these students juggle the demands of the group with the demands of their classes. Since most performances are on weekends, Brian tries to get all of his studying and homework done during the week. Others do the same during the bus rides to and from each gig. But why choose such a hectic schedule and lifestyle?

Although Brian appreciates the partial scholarship, he does it all for one simple reason: "I love to perform!" He is also touched by the enthusiastic reaction from audiences. "It's not rare to see older people crying after a performance, because it reminds them of their childhood."

Susan Stafura started out as a Tammie in 1971. Now their Wardrobe and Resource Manager, Susan has assisted the Tamburitians with costumes, music and vocal arrangements for the past 13 years.

With a mix of original costumes, produced in the country of origin, and reproductions sometimes made by Susan and her staff on-site, she noted, "The goal



of every Tamburitizens' performance is to reproduce, as accurately as possible, the picture of that country or scene in each performance."

The more you talk to a Tamburitizan, the more you realize that they are not just a part of a performance assembly -- they are part of a subculture and a way of life. "It's a very closely knit group," Brian explained. "Everyone knows what is going on with everyone else."

And once you become a Tamburitizan, it stays with you forever. Spending so much time together while performing and traveling on the road, in addition to being connected to such an intimate, demanding, artistic micro-society creates an invisible bond that truly lasts a lifetime.

Tammie alumni continue to attend performances, well after their time with the group, and there are social organizations and clubs for former members.

When asked what is unique about being a Tammie, Susan Stafura explained, "The Tamburitizens are a type of spirit, not spiritual, but a kind of essence. Every piece is important, and every person is a piece of the greater jigsaw puzzle that is the Tamburitizens."

Auditions are open to high school seniors and college undergraduates who are talented in the disciplines of dance, instrumental and/or vocal performance. Call 412-396-5185, e-mail [tamburitizens@duq.edu](mailto:tamburitizens@duq.edu) or visit [www.tamburitizens.duq.edu](http://www.tamburitizens.duq.edu) for more information.

The last local performance of the Tamburitizens' Spring Season is April 22, 8 p.m., at McKeesport High School. Contact Bob Stone at 412-678-6652 for ticket information. ❖



## By Hal English

## FIRST PERSON

### *Hello, I'd like to introduce myself to you.*

My name is Hal English and I am an elder law attorney and the owner of H.A. English and Associates, P.C. I help clients and their family members in estate planning, wills, powers of attorney, trust documents and creating special needs trusts for families that have disabled persons. I handle estates after a loved one dies, which includes protecting and preserving family assets involving medical assistance planning. I greatly enjoy working with seniors and helping to protect them.

My favorite senior client is my great grandmother who will celebrate her 100th birthday this year. Her positive attitude and great spirit have always been an inspiration to me. I am determined that by the time I turn sixty to have numerous friends in their forties so that when I am in my eighties I will have many sixty year old friends to call on me.

I married the lovely Sue Killinger who grew up in Shaler, graduating from Shaler area in 1980. Sue and I now reside in Hampton Township. We will celebrate our 18th wedding anniversary this year. We have two sons, Garrett and Jayson, who are 5th and 1st graders. Our dog, Cedar, has been with us one year. Previously, Lucky dog was with us for 16 years.

Being faithful to my family and church as well as working hard for myself and others were values that were instilled by my parents. Mom was a schoolteacher for over 30 years earning two Masters Degrees in education counseling. Dad had a landscape business and floral shop while also being a school bus driver. My time working with my grandparents on the family farm as a youngster stays with me today as I enjoy working outdoors, taking a vigorous walk and gardening.

I have served in the Marine Corps for over twenty years on active duty and the reserves from the age of 18. I am now 42. As a Lieutenant Colonel in the Marine Corps Reserves I have just completed the maximum 24 month Reserve Recall to active duty in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom as the Site Commander and JAG of Marine Aviation Units. Previously I served as the Company Commander of a



motor transport company. In the Marine Corps I learned that no matter what troubles a day brings me, I know that it could always be hotter, colder, wetter or tougher and not to stress as the sun will rise in the morning.

Holding a pilot's license, playing ice hockey, running a 26 mile marathon and riding 180 miles of the C & O Canal in two days on a bicycle are accomplishments that I take pride in. Taking time to sit on the porch and drink iced tea are moments missed all too frequently.

One of my greatest joys is watching the neighborhood children play in our backyard. They will be the decision makers of tomorrow.

My volunteer activities include assisting my son's hockey and soccer teams, being the president and treasurer of the Sole & Small Firm Section of the Allegheny County Bar Association, being on the Board of Directors of the North Hills Senior Service, volunteering for the North Hills Community Outreach, serving as chairperson of St. Paul's Staff Parish Committee and Stewardship Committee and volunteering with retired military service organizations. See what I mean about the iced tea?

My offices are located in the North Hills on Babcock Blvd. in Ross Township and Allison Park at Mt. Royal Blvd. and Duncan Avenue.

If you would like to meet with me regarding your estate planning or elder law needs I would be honored to speak with you. Call on me at 412-931-6300.

Semper fidelis,  
Hal English ❖

*The information in First Person advertisements is the responsibility of the advertiser.*