

## SYCAMORE PUMPKIN FESTIVAL COMMITTEE

### 2009 Sycamore Pumpkin Festival Grand Marshall

---

“Family, Friends, Corps and Sycamore” – When one thinks of parades, images of bands playing, baton twirlers throwing their batons high into the air, colors of flags flying, and decorative floats come to mind. Sycamore is lucky enough to have one of the premier founders of a baton/drum corps in our very midst! She has remarkable enthusiasm and a sense of pride that is instilled into her students, not only about themselves but also for the area they represent. Her belief that “the door opens when you are skilled enough” is the backbone for her mantra: practice, practice, practice. Her accomplishments number into the thousands. As one of our best ambassadors of Sycamore, the Pumpkin Festival Committee has selected Marlyn Burkhart as the Grand Marshall for the 2009 parade.

Marlyn was born and raised in Sycamore. She attended Sycamore schools, and later NIU in the early education program. The fact that her father was from Sycamore and her mother from Chicago gave her the best of both worlds growing up – the beautiful country and the wonderful opportunity of shopping, theaters, museums and dining. She was involved in parade life early on. Her father and grandfather both marched with Burlington in the band and her mother cleaned the uniforms. At the age of 5, her feet hit the streets at parade time.

So how did the now world-famous Majorettes and Drum Corps come to be? Somehow it just happened. What originally began in high school with teaching a few lessons of taped music to baton twirlers gradually progressed to color guards with flags and then eventually a drum line. The snowball effect resulted in a three-unit corps that has won local, state, national and world championships – not just once but numerous times. This is as a result of her determination to set goals, practice, and be one of the best. She then makes travel experience educational and fun. From Thanksgiving dinner at the Ford Museum to the Indy 500, from the local pumpkin parade to the grand stage of London, from performances that also feature Minnie Pearl to The Who, she provides a challenging yet unique experience to her students. Her hope is that parents will realize the gains a child can achieve through corps: responsibility and dedication, transcending into success in future years for the child, as well as financial gains in the form of college scholarships. Additionally, “kids go on to win personal world championships – they are THE BEST in the world. “ Her enthusiasm for the success of each student is very evident!

Marlyn also started her own baton competition 30 years ago in conjunction with the Pumpkin Festival. It is now rated one of the top three best competitions to attend. “Coming behind Notre Dame and Disney is not bad!” She attributes the success to the willingness of the local merchants to donate such wonderful prizes. “The reason why we are in the top three is because of all the people. We have such a giving community.” However, unfortunately this year there will not be a competition. Due to the

economy everyone has had to cut back, from merchants to even the individuals who compete. She holds out hope that things will turn around for next year and Sycamore will once again be host to batons flying through the air. On a positive note, she will be spending more personal time with the alumni that come to town to see her as Grand Marshall. She considers being Grand Marshall “one of the most important honors. It is very special.” Be sure to wave and let her know if you happen to be alumni as she passes by on parade day.

Her involvement with the Pumpkin Festival dates back to the beginning. She was the first to have a nonprofit booth, selling Wisconsin cheese and later BBQ ribs. Memories of 500 lbs. of ribs make her sigh deeply! She has marched in every parade since the festival started. “Originally we would line up at Dutton’s house on West State. There were a lot of kids in Halloween costumes. Together we would lead the parade through town, down to Brown’s location, the old high school. The parade then was local bands, kids in costumes and floats. One family in particular stands out, a **family from Waterman**, who had the most beautiful floats! It was a fun Sycamore day.”

Marlyn continues in the footsteps of parents, who were very community oriented, serving both Burlington and Sycamore. Her father served the School Board for 18 years. “It was a way of life, give back and love what you are doing.”

“Friends are special, I have a wonderful family and I love my city”. . . These are reflections of someone who is very content with life. Life does offer more in Sycamore! The 2009 Sycamore Pumpkin Festival Committee is very proud to have Marlyn Burkhart as our Grand Marshall.