

# San Antonio Pipes and Drums: A Family Tradition

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For students of the University of the Incarnate Word, nothing is more symbolic of commencement than the sounds of pipes and drums. Countless alumni are transported right back to their graduation day any time they hear the bagpipes start to play.

But what lies behind our beloved tradition is more than just the music that makes us beam with pride, it's the dedication of the Sutherland family and the pipes and drums that their founder, Harrell Sutherland, started playing more than 50 years ago.

The San Antonio Pipes and Drums (SAPD), a non-profit organization that ranges in size from 20 to 25 members, first played for Incarnate Word's commencement ceremony in 1991. The following

year, Sutherland received word that they would not be needed for graduation. However, after a short time he received another letter saying that given other options, the students requested the bagpipes.

“We have been part of every graduation since,” said Sutherland. And just like that, a tradition was born.

For many years, students eagerly anticipated their turn to hear the bagpipes and drums leading the procession through campus, past the clock tower and over the bridge where the faculty would be waiting to applaud the soon-to-be graduates. But with growing enrollment came a challenge to find an on-campus facility that would be large enough for the number of graduates and their guests, ultimately leading to the move to the Freeman Coliseum.

Still, the UIW administration aims to keep the tradition alive with an opportunity for the graduation candidates to ceremoniously walk through campus with the pipes and drums in procession to the baccalaureate mass each year. The SAPD continues to lead the procession for each professional school to their graduation at the McDermott Convocation Center and the procession through the Freeman Coliseum on graduation day for undergraduate, graduate and doctoral students.

To introduce new students to the tradition of the pipes and drums, SAPD has recently started playing for the freshman pinning ceremony in what is sure to become another treasured UIW tradition. What’s more, Centro Universitario Incarnate Word in Mexico City has continued this cherished custom internationally. Since 2008, bagpipers have lead the procession for every graduation ceremony.

As much as the celebratory sound of the pipes and drums has become a tradition for UIW, so too has UIW become a tradition for the SAPD band.

As the founding family with several generations in the band, the Sutherlands are the nucleus of SAPD. Harrell’s late wife, Nell, and their children, David, Kent and Margie have all played with the band at some point since its founding in 1986.

“Mama played the bass drum,” remembers Sutherland of his wife. “Nell was our bass drummer for about 20 years until her physical stamina was not enough. She continued with the band by playing a tenor drum which is much lighter than the bass. She continued with that until a few weeks before her passing.”

Nell now lives on in the legacy of her family. In 2010, Sutherland’s son David became the leader of the group. He focuses on teaching pipe lessons for beginners and increasing new members. His wife and daughter also play in the band as snare drummers.

These days the band plays approximately 70 to 95 performances each year. But even after playing for large scale, city-wide events and important people, Sutherland asserts that “UIW still holds first place.”



The SAPD all smiles for another UIW graduation.

“It would be difficult to pin down one favorite memory of participating in UIW events. At the top of the list would be simply the fact that it makes us feel great to be part of such a fantastic institution,” said Sutherland. “There are other little tidbits such as waiting in the Convocation Center’s locker room between processional and recessional. It was fun to look at the lockers with the names of the San Antonio Spurs who had practiced there at that time.

“Also, it is a warm fuzzy when we encounter people who had graduated some years before and still remember our pipes and drums. In fact, we recently encountered a young woman who we had played for both her undergraduate graduation and her master’s degree graduation. Then we played for her wedding,” he said.

SAPD has a UIW graduation tradition of their own. After the ceremony, the group can be found at local favorite, Good Time Charlie’s on Broadway, enjoying a celebratory dinner in honor of another successful commencement with UIW.

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