Marita Begley, artistic director

Marita Begley is both the artistic director and the head drum major of the Lesbian & Gay Big Apple Corps Marching Band. She has served in these leadership roles for nearly ten years, and her affiliation with the ensemble began almost three decades ago. Under her baton, the band has won 19 awards in parades from Rochester, New York, to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and made history as the first gay band to perform for a U.S. president and the first to march in a ticker-tape parade.

Each year, Begley leads the Lesbian & Gay Big Apple Corps in events large and small along the eastern seaboard. Annual highlights include the Hambletonian Parade in Rutherford, New Jersey; the Fourth of July parades in Montclair and Asbury Park, New Jersey; and gay pride parades from Montreal to Washington, D.C.

The marching band has twice made history under her direction, both times in major national events in New York City: in 1991's Operation Welcome Home ticker-tape parade celebrating the allied victors in the Persian Gulf War and, two years earlier, in a parade honoring George Washington's inauguration, at which then president George H. W. Bush delivered a nationally televised address.

Active in the marching band community for almost 40 years, Begley is a sought-after director when the international Lesbian & Gay Band Association (LGBA) has a high-profile event. In 2009, she led a 170-member LGBA ensemble, including color guard, dancers, and musicians from 32 bands across the U.S. in the Inaugural Parade for President Barack Obama. This was the first time a gay band marched in an inaugural parade.

When Chicago hosted the 2006 Gay Games, LGBA again tapped Begley, this time to teach a field show to 200 musicians from around the world for the Opening Ceremonies. She delivered a performance at Soldier Field in three days for an audience of 60,000.

Begley began marching in 1972 as a clarinetist with the Holy Spirit High School Marching Band. At Syracuse University, which has one of the country's top-ranked marching band programs, she served as the clarinet squad leader for the Pride of the Orange Marching Band, the flagship college band for the State of New York.

Begley lives in Glen Ridge, New Jersey, with her civil union partner Ana Del Campo. She dedicates every performance to the memory of her beloved parents and her godmother as well her dear friend and former fellow drum major Duane Allen. She is forever indebted to the amazing members of the Lesbian & Gay Big Apple Corps, who make the magic possible.

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