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Frozen in Time

THE THUNDERBIRD MARCHING BAND FIRES UP TEAM SPIRIT



HOMECOMING PERFORMANCE

Positioned alongside the student section, the Thunderbird Marching Band is committed to supporting Southern Utah University's football team. Though the band has always strived to enhance the school's game-day atmosphere with its music, there was a period of time when that goal was harder to achieve.

From 2012 to 2022, SUU's marching band was small compared to what it stands today. Adam Lambert, director of bands and brass studies at SUU, worked tirelessly to revive the program. Partnering with the Dean of the College of Performing and Visual Arts Shauna Mendini, several proposals were submitted to establish a full-time athletic band director position and secure

a budget for the project. Despite these efforts, it took several years before the idea gained serious consideration. Along with his position as a professor and conductor for the Wind Symphony and Brass Ensemble, Lambert was the only one in charge of the SUU's marching band.

"It was like a plane that can't quite take off, and it just couldn't get going," said Lawrence Johnson, chairman of the SUU Music Department.

Unwilling to give up, Lambert submitted the proposal again in 2022. This time, with financial backing from Provost Jon

Anderson and SUU Athletics, the music department secured the necessary funding to hire a director dedicated to the program. That year, David Torres was appointed as the director of the Thunderbird Marching Band.

Originally from Florida, Torres began his musical career as a trumpet player at Walt Disney World before advancing to become a professional trumpeter. He participated in national and international Broadway musical tours, as well as productions of Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus.

Torres' job with the Thunderbirds isn't the first time he has been tasked with defrosting a collegiate marching band. Before relocating to Utah, he developed the marching band program at Southern Arkansas University, growing it to over 200 members and earning recognition through performances across the United States.

"I was basically told that SUU did not have a marching band and wanted to start one," said Torres. "They showed me their vision, what they wanted to do, and it worked out for me."

Since its revival two years ago, the band has made a remarkable impact, bringing energy and spirit to the campus. With just 73 members in 2022, the Thunderbird Marching Band has grown to 110 members and continues to thrive.

In the 2024-2025 school year, the band presented two distinct shows, titled "Movies" and "Divas." They featured female artists' songs such as Dua Lipa's "Don't Start Now," Aretha Franklin's "A Natural Woman" and Beyoncé's "CUFF IT," alongside scores

from movies including Indiana Jones and James Bond. At these halftime performances, fans of all ages rock to the beat of the drumline and sway to the familiar melodies of these popular tunes.

"The visual aspect of (marching band) and the support that it gives to the game, there's just nothing like it. It looks spectacular," said Johnson. "A lot of people have given us feedback saying that it just adds so much to a football game."

To perform at its best, the band holds three practices per week, running from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. Torres leads these sessions, along with Kevin Johnson, drumline director and Allison Thibault Weber, color guard director.

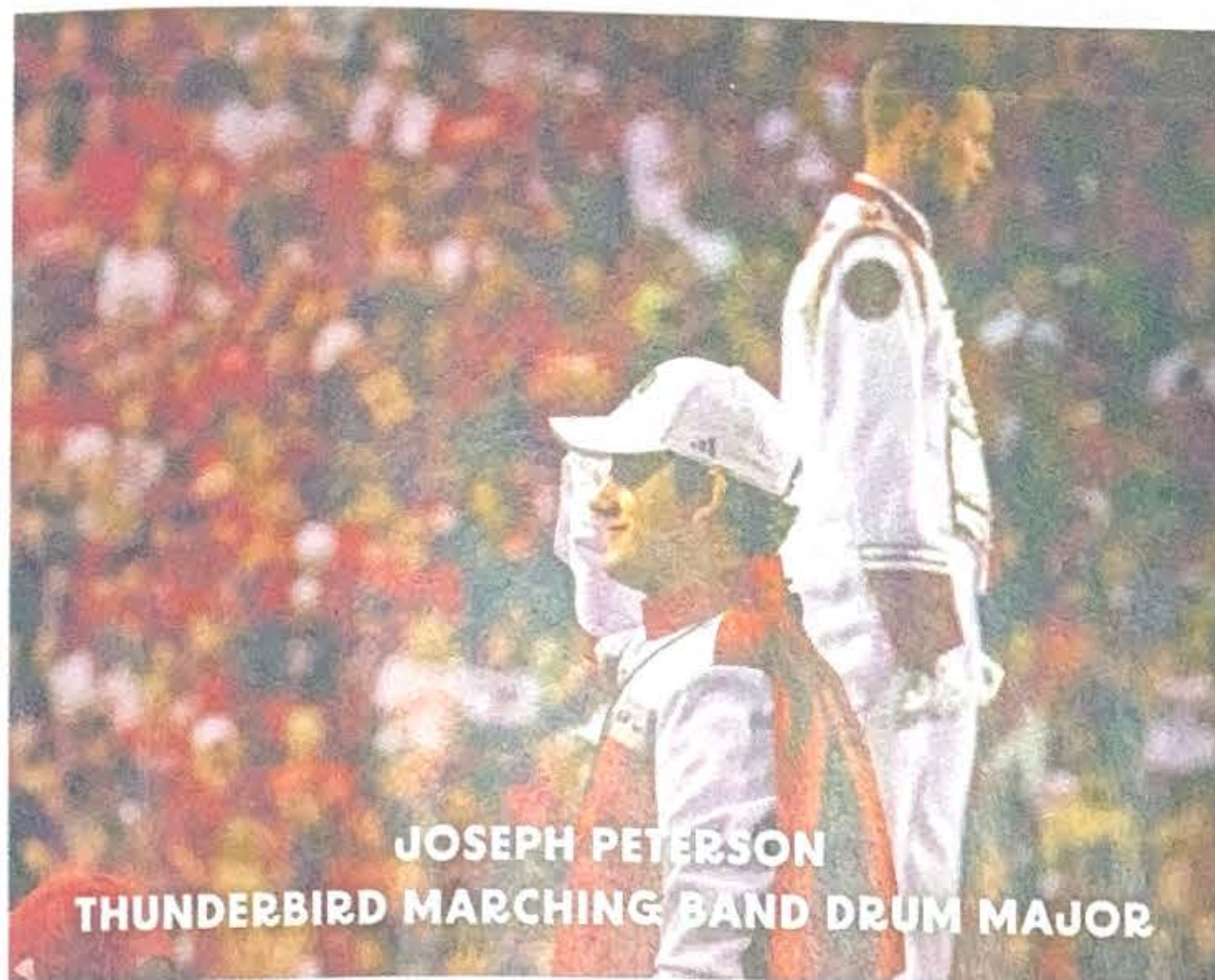
Being part of a marching band isn't just about playing music. It requires time, dedication and discipline. Members must not only play their instruments but also learn how to march to specific rhythms, memorize different shows and project their music across the field to the farthest corners of the stadium. Before the academic year begins, the members are required to participate in a 10-day camp, during which they train for about 12 hours a day. Though the work is hard, their efforts are rewarded—literally.

The Thunderbird Marching Band is one of the few university organizations that compensate its members. At the end of the semester, students receive a stipend for their hard work. And the program offers them the opportunity to travel.

"I love being able to travel all around Utah with the band," said

HALFTIME PERFORMANCE WITH IDAHO STATE UNIVERSITY





JOSEPH PETERSON
THUNDERBIRD MARCHING BAND DRUM MAJOR

Valerie Frias, member of the band's color guard. "I'm someone who enjoys the change in scenery."

This season, the band traveled nearly two thousand miles to support the football team at away games. Performing at both the University of Utah and Idaho State, they also participated in exhibitions at competitions such as the Clark High School "Tournament on the Turf" Marching Competition and the Utah Red Rocks State Marching Band Championships. Altogether, the Thunderbird Marching Band performed for over 52 thousand people, serving as both recruitment opportunities and a means to build the program's legacy.

"The thing that's very special about being in the third year of a marching band created out of thin air is that the members get to figure out what they want," said Torres. "It's a very exciting time because everything we do is creating that new culture. That's my favorite thing."

Over the past 120 years since the establishment of its first band, SUU's athletic bands have undergone numerous changes, and the program shows no signs of slowing down. With new uniforms introduced in 2024, the band is ready to showcase its talents and support the T-Birds wherever they go. In the upcoming year, they plan to travel to San Diego and participate in additional shows in Salt Lake City and Las Vegas.

If the band reaches 200 members in the coming years, Torres envisions competing in a regional Bands of America event, securing a spot in the Rose Bowl Parade in Los Angeles or even performing at an NFL game.

"As far as what we do, we're reaching new highs every year," said Torres. "Our potential is to become one of the best college marching bands in the state of Utah."

The Thunderbird Marching Band and its achievements are a source of pride for its members, the university and the football team.

"One of my favorite memories is from this year's homecoming game— seeing the football players join us to perform 'Hey, Fighting T-Bird' after their victory," said Frias.

"The administration loves it, and the student body loves it. It brings just a lot of positive feelings and energy to the university," added Lambert. "We hope to continue to grow it."

With the commitment to improvement and success, the Thunderbird Marching Band aims to leave a lasting impact by continuing to spread the sound of Southern Utah for years to come.

-Written by Fanny Felixine

