

Melvin P. Harley Invests Talent in Anacostia Youth

This is another in a series of articles on hobbies and community activities of Comsat employees

By Judy Posner

Melvin P. Harley, Comsat messenger, introduced us to a vital dedicated group of teenagers across the river and up on a hill in Anacostia. An ardent spokesman for a youthful drum and bugle corps, Melvin directed us to the church of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, where the extraordinary corps performed their musical routine in tautly disciplined style behind the bingo tables in the church basement.



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They call themselves the V.I.P. Corps and Melvin has a reason for his pride and enthusiasm in the group and serves as their official spokesman. For three years, from 1961 to 1963, he was president of the Church's youth group and had been a member of a drum and bugle corps. But he saw that there existed no worthwhile, constructive youth organization in his community.

The parish priest, Father St. Amand, was also concerned for the kids of Anacostia, who by statistical standards fall in the underprivileged class. He



The Corps practices every week in the basement of the Catholic Church.

wanted to offer some form of assistance in a vital and constructive way.

Melvin spoke to the Priest about forming a drum and bugle corps, and although Father St. Amand was originally hesitant about forming the corps, he finally flung himself into the project with his New England zeal and the group was formed. The Priest managed to raise \$1,500 through his own efforts, but now he seems a bit chagrined.

"I had not idea that it would be such a fund consuming proposition," he said, "but how could we stop now?"

There was no apathy in the unified 83-member group, as they snappily went through their paces in the chilly basement. They were all spark and polish and pride, and even those in makeshift uniforms created the illusion of parade dress.

Melvin, devoted to the group, says: "These kids try, and they have so many handicaps. But the corps gives

them a chance — a chance to care about themselves and belonging to the rest of the world — not just Anacostia. They get a chance to travel to different cities where conferences are being held, and you know, out on the field, drilling, being judged, they get a little feeling of glory. That's the reward for plain hard



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work. It makes them want to make the effort."

We talked to other adults who, like Melvin Harley, contribute time and talent to the corps.

Frances Tidwell and Evelyn Scott are counselors for the girl's color guard, and both have spent long nights helping the kids contrive uniforms.

Charles M. Warfield, a handsome father of five who holds down three jobs, is director of the corps and has been since its inception in 1965, and Bill Semanek, a quiet-redhead, teaches the kids the refinements of drums and bugles and puts them through the drills.

"You see," Melvin Harley says earnestly, "the kids have something to try for and they're learning that you see

