

# Company History



## In the beginning

As a teenager, Lawrence "Herkie" Herkimer would leave his home on Abbot Street and walk down the railroad tracks to North Dallas High School, where he faced his stuttering problem every day. As he walked down those rails, he discovered that he developed balance and muscle control. Surely he could do the same with his stuttering problem, he concluded. So he bravely enrolled in a speech class.

He soon learned that his speech problem could be controlled, but only with practice. The confidence he gained from his speech teacher encouraged him to put his gymnastic ability to good use. He tried out for high school cheerleader, and his hard work snagged him a squad position the first time he tried out. That was the day Herkie discovered that he never stuttered when he cheered.

"If people had told me back then that I would be making my living going around the country lecturing on cheerleading, I would have never believed them because I couldn't speak worth a darn," laughs Mr. Herkimer. "I did overcome it. The only thing now is that I really can't put on a subterfuge 'cause I start to stutter. I guess it's God's way of making me an honest man."

After college in 1948, Lawrence Herkimer, whose philosophy was "I think I can, I think I can," opened a company called National Cheerleaders Association (NCA) in his hometown of Dallas, Texas.

## And then there was NCA

In 1948, Herkie organized the first cheerleader camp at Sam Houston State University in Huntsville, Texas. Fifty-two girls attended the seminar, which also included a speech professor to present tips on speaking in front of an audience and an English teacher to aid with cheer rhymes. Neither the English teacher nor the speech teacher impressed the fifty-two girls, but Herkie did. He used gymnastics and motions to show them how to stimulate and direct crowd response. The girls were elated. They had experienced a totally innovative phenomenon.

Shortly after establishing his camps, Herkimer traveled to New York and stumbled upon a new electronic contraption called colored television. Realizing that the little chrome batons that majorettes twirled on Texas turf would be virtually unrecognizable from grandstand cameras, he came up with the idea of tying vividly colored crepe paper streamers on a little stick that could be waved in the air to attract attention. This was the birth of the pom pom. Choreographed to the tune of "Lollipop", the Wichita Falls, Texas, high school cheerleaders made history as the first team to perform a half-time routine using the new hand-held props.

It was actually Herkimer's wife, Dorothy, who nudged him into his next venture, Cheerleader Supply Company. After his day at NCA and her day teaching school, the two would head to their garage to package pom pom kits to sell to area high school cheerleaders.

Cheerleader Supply was in full swing in the 1950's, offering skirts and sweaters for every occasion. It was then that Herkie realized that students needed a venue by which to help pay for these uniforms.

Opposed to the likes of those who made the rounds selling candy, light bulbs and candles, Herkimer demanded a combination sales product that coincidentally inspired school spirit. The booster ribbon was the perfect solution. Starting with "Beat the Bears" or some facsimile thereof, the moneymaking items were soon to include ribbons, megaphones, mascot-printed miniature footballs, booster buttons, and souvenir pennants, all sold at low price points. These items offered assistance to cheerleaders hoping to afford new uniforms and cheerleading camp.

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When it became evident that contractors could not provide all the manufacturing necessary to supply the demand, Herkie set up a clothing factory and later a knitting mill and chenille emblem company. Now there are more sources of contractors than there were in the late sixties and early seventies. NCA and Cheerleader Supply Company flourished under the parent company of National Spirit Group.

## **The birth of NDA**

NDA (formerly NCA Superstar and NCA Danz) made its debut as an operating division of the National Cheerleaders Association in 1976. Dance was always a part of the curriculum at NCA camps; however, it wasn't until this time that the dance division was given its own recognized name. From its beginning, with 10 camps and 800 students, NDA has now grown into one of the most prestigious and well-known dance companies.

In 1993 the corporate strategy for dance changed to focus on a broad range of school dance teams (drill, pom, hiphop, etc.), and the name was changed to NCA Danz. In the fall of 1999 the dance division of the National Spirit Group experienced yet another name change and the National Dance Alliance (NDA) was born. The purpose for the final name brand change from NCA Danz to NDA is to exemplify NSG's corporate commitment to the dance brand. The vision of NDA is to create the largest, most influential organization in the dance community that benefits directors and dancers by providing cutting edge instruction, performance, competition, and apparel opportunities for the wide spectrum of dance styles. The word "alliance" was chosen to promote NDA's initiative to penetrate the dance market with opportunity to partner with a wide variety of dance industry professionals. NDA continues its growth as the most exciting, high quality full service provider in the dance spirit industry.

## **NCA & NDA today**

In February of 2004 it was announced that the two largest forces in the cheer and dance industry, Varsity Spirit Corp and National Spirit Group, had merged in order to provide more advantages to employees, vendors, and especially customers through an increase in the collective knowledge base of the two companies and the implementation of "best practices" across all products and services. Both Varsity and NSG brought to this endeavor a rich heritage of pride and success, as well as an abundance of unique assets. These brands, and the people who built them, represented the real value in our businesses, therefore no change in name (NCA & NDA) or operating method for any of these groups was experienced. Instead, these separate and distinct groups continue to offer the customer the opportunity to utilize the products and services they desire, while still realizing the enhanced benefits a large and more efficient company can offer. Varsity Spirit has expanded over the years and is now the worldwide leader in all things spirit – including cheerleading, dance team and performing arts apparel, education camps and competitions – impacting more than a million athletes each year. The Varsity Spirit headquarters is located in Memphis, Tennessee, and Bill Seely is the President of the company. The National Cheerleaders Association and National Dance Alliance brands are managed out of the offices in the Dallas area.

NCA & NDA camps touch the lives of thousands of cheerleaders and dancers each year. In addition to Summer Camps, NCA & NDA hosts Championships and sends athletes to Special Events annually, attracting participants from all over the nation.