

Dan Abramowicz: I'm Dan Abramowicz from the Graduate School Class of 1984. I'm the Chief Technology Officer at a metal packaging company called Crown Holdings. But regarding Princeton, I am a former President of the Association of the Princeton Graduate Alumni and a member of the Princetoniana Committee. I'm doing this project on the history of the Marshalls for the Princetoniana, and Dan, I greatly appreciate your willingness to help here. Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. Before we begin, would you like to briefly introduce yourself?

Daniel Lopresti: Sure. I'm Dan Lopresti. Obviously you and I know each other going back a very long time. Yes, I'm '87, graduate class of 1987. Like you, I was past President of the APGA and I was involved in the APGA for quite a long time. And we have seen the APGA organization grow, change, adapt and get bigger and better, which is exactly what we'd both like to see. And I'm a professor at Lehigh University. I've been at Lehigh for about 20 years, which isn't that far a drive from Princeton. So under normal circumstances, I could go back and forth quite a bit. And I've done a lot of different things as a volunteer leader for Princeton. And I would say definitely being the Grand Marshall of the P-rade is the icing on the cake or the decoration on top of the icing on the cake.

Dan Abramowicz: Excellent. Very good. And with the honors you've been given over the years, recognizing your volunteer service to Princeton University, I'll just add my thanks as well.

Could you please remind me of the years that you were a Grand Marshall of the P-rade?

Daniel Lopresti: Sure. I was Grand Marshall from 2016 through 2018, so a total of three years in that role.

Dan Abramowicz: Great. And as I understand, you also participate the previous year, so in 2015, you would've been the Grand Marshall-Elect or something like that?

Daniel Lopresti: Actually, there are a number of Marshal leadership roles. If you've seen pictures, there's the Grand Marshal and usually Flanking Marshalls one on either side. And then there's also often one or two Lead Marshals who sort of go in front of everyone and nudge / cajole people out of the way. So there are typically three or four other "leadership" roles and other important responsibilities too. And if you ask me when I was a Flanking Marshal, it was certainly a few years before that. But that's the first time you actually march at the very front of the P-rade, which is really cool. So I can't actually remember, I was a Flanking Marshal maybe two or three times. And if you ask about 2015, I honestly don't remember what role I was doing in 2015.

So I wasn't the Grand Marshal-Elect at that point. I can investigate when I was asked to be the Grand Marshal, because I literally remember getting the phone call. I remember where I was, literally remember the discussion on the phone when I was asked. Because it came totally out of the blue, because you probably

know, I'm the first grad alum to ever be the Grand Marshal of the P-rade. So I basically assumed there were a lot of cool leadership roles for me and I'd had some already, but I never imagined that I would be the Grand Marshal of the P-rade. So it floored me. It was such an honor I can even remember when I got the call back in April 2015.

Dan Abramowicz: And you bring up a great point. I mean, as you know, and we've worked a lot together on this, the university has been trying to integrate graduate alumni more and more into the broader university community. And asking you to serve as the first graduate alumna Grand Marshal is a great example of that. So congratulations for that honor. I know you were a Marshal for years before that as well. Any sense of how many years you've been a Marshal in the P-rade?

Daniel Lopresti: I would guess about 15 years before I became the Grand Marshal, so I certainly knew many of the ropes. Although as you know, from your own experience, there are people who've been Marshals for decades and I'm just always awe struck when I'm in the audience of these individuals who've been in some cases serving as a Marshal almost as long as I've been alive. Maybe not quite that long, but close. It's just mind boggling to think about.

Dan Abramowicz: Very true. Very true. Now, just thinking a little about the role of the Marshals in the P-rade, what do you view as their key function or responsibility?

Daniel Lopresti: Yes, there's actually even a "standard" pitch. You've heard it given because we passed the script forward to the next Grand Marshal, but you'll hear the same terms over and over again. It's to make sure that everyone has an enjoyable and safe experience. That is the primary responsibility by far, making the P-rade enjoyable and safe. Some past Grand Marshals, some of my wonderful predecessors, would say, "to make sure that people leave with a smile on their face." That's what you really want that the experience to be. So that being said, enjoyable and safe, and as you know, there are many aspects to safety that probably the average viewer of the P-rade or even marcher doesn't realize are keeping people safe.

One good example is the floats. There are some motorized floats and some other vehicles in the P-rade. As you know, along the route, there are some very tight turns. And you know, there are kids who are very excited about seeing the P-rade and they'll rush out onto the route and occasionally there will be candy or other things that are distributed. As you know, we keep a very watchful eye on the floats and the kids and on anything that could be dangerous. So that's certainly part of it. I mean, we're not really trained health professionals, but you have to be aware of possible hazards. For example, often it's incredibly hot. We have a whole range of participants, some of whom are quite elderly, and clearly we are not charged with administering medical aid, but being aware of what to do if someone is having an issue. So safety for sure, enjoyability for sure.

And then after that we're very concerned, as the P-rade is actually quite long, to finish it in a reasonable amount of time. So one of the things we try very hard to

do is to make sure that there are no gaps. You'll hear Marshals say over and over again, "Please close the gap ... come on, keep moving." Especially in this day where everyone's taking selfies and videos, and then obviously chatting with friends who they haven't seen for quite a while, which is understandable, but we can't allow that to slow down the P-rade. So those are some of the other things that the marshals are responsible for doing.

And then there's some special stuff that happens that not a lot of people are necessarily aware of, like getting the P-rade started. So the Grand Marshal has a key role in kicking it off the P-rade at 2:00 PM. And I tell you, that is the most frantic, anxious, and a little bit scary time. There is a lot of stress on the Grand Marshal and a couple of the other lead Marshals who are up there helping in front of FitzRandolph Gate. And that's when I was thinking, "Oh my God, I'm going to be the Grand Marshal who allows the P-rade to start 15 minutes late!" You know what I mean? That person. So there's a lot of logistics involved in getting the P-rade started.

Dan Abramowicz: Yes, certainly. I've used the analogy of herding cats. I mean, you've got all these people who are there to have a good time. They're very focused on their own experience. And as you said, meeting friends and colleagues and classmates they haven't seen for many years and we're supposed to keep them on a schedule. So that can definitely be a challenge.

Daniel Lopresti: And getting started at the front can be challenging. There's actually an "Order of March". I don't know if you've seen it, but there's an official "Order of March." So, we know the order of groups at the very start of a P-rade. Obviously, the Old Guard is one of the most important groups of alums at the front and everyone's very excited to see the Old Guard. But there are also all the dignitaries in front, including the President of the University. There are also the flags, the Princeton flag and the US flag. Then there is the band, the tiger, and the Lead Marshalls. There are also the Alumni Council Officers, and there's an expected specific order for all of these groups. So you're running around five minutes before the P-rade saying, "Where is this person? Where is this person? Where is this person? You're not here. You're not where you're supposed to be." So, it can be a little bit scary at the very, very start. And that's mostly the responsibility of the Grand Marshal and then some of the other Lead Marshals at the beginning.

Dan Abramowicz: Terrific. That's a great perspective. And it sounds like it's certainly a bit stressful at the start. In thinking about the role of the Grand Marshal, have there been any changes to that role during your tenure?

Daniel Lopresti: I wouldn't say there were changes, but we're always learning. We're always adapting. And you've attended some of the meetings, the breakfast meetings and things like that. And obviously it's more than just preparing right before the event. It might be like preparing before a football game or something like that. That might be a good analogy. So you're saying, "Okay, what is the lay of the land? What do we have to look out for? What is special this time that we

haven't ever seen before?" So, it is not like the role changes, but there are always things that you've got to adapt, to make it a little bit better, to learn from what you did last year that might not have worked so well. So, we try some new things, keep the new things that worked well, and take a lot of advice.

One of the other skills, not just for the Grand Marshal, but the other Marshals, is taking advice, because everyone's got an opinion about the P-rade. There are literally 20,000 different opinions about the P-rade. And you'll hear all of them when you're the Grand Marshal. Like, "Oh, we should do this, or we should do that." And you've got to be very open to those opinions as some of the ideas are really very good.

So, I wouldn't say the role has changed, but we're constantly learning and adapting and paying attention and fine tuning. And occasionally the role needs to evolve because of changes, such as a route change that puts some pressure on the amount of space that's available on the campus to muster the marchers and the spectators. It requires a lot of flexibility, adaptability, and creativity to manage. But the role itself, at least during my time, hasn't changed significantly.

Dan Abramowicz:

Dan, you bring up a great perspective on this idea of learning, applying best practices, and of course new tools. I mean, now all the Marshals take our cell phones and put in an emergency number that we can easily access if needed. That tool didn't exist 30 years ago, or even 20 years ago. So yes, as you say, we need to keep finding ways to do it better. And I think that the organization has done a great job of doing that.

Speaking of change, have there been any changes to the P-rade itself during your tenure? You mentioned the parade route, for example.

Daniel Lopresti:

Yes. Well, I mean, not as my tenure year as Grand Marshal, but going back far enough, the 25th Reunion class has lined up in several different locations. I can remember at least three different locations where the 25th Reunion class would line up to prepare to march. It used to be the whole class would spill out onto Nassau Street for a short number of years. As you probably know, that wreaked a little bit of havoc on the traffic on Nassau Street. And since Reunions are often very close to Memorial Day, that's two days that Nassau Street gets shut down. So, we have adapted and now it's just the Class Leaders that go out onto Nassau Street with the vanguard of the P-rade and the class itself musters in a different location on front campus. So that's a pretty clear, dramatic change.

The locations of the classes is sliding and expanding a little bit as more and more people come back for Reunions. So there are slight adaptations there. Some of the older Marshals can tell you about really major changes in the routes. I mean, there've been some huge changes in the way we march, and some of the older Marshals will tell you, "Well, we used to go by this completely different route. We should go by this completely different route." The history is that the P-rade

would precede the Yale-Princeton baseball game. The actual route used to take you towards the athletic fields, which is not really the way that we do it now.

But we've changed other things beyond the actual route, to fine tune and to tweak things. Most people don't recognize these changes. For example, the "WaterMonsters" are a fairly recent innovation. They are gigantic ... I don't know how many hundreds of gallons of water they hold. But you've seen them around the campus and that's a recent change. They probably were introduced a year or two before I became the Grand Marshal, but they were such a hit from the start. It's like, "Get more and more and more of them." And you could walk around after the P-rade and notice that the vast majority of them were empty, which meant they served their purpose. People were hydrating and probably not suffering the effects of the heat. So that's one example.

Another example, and I'll claim a little bit of credit for this one, involved a pretty serious problem we had with the senior class. I don't know if you have been down on the lower campus when the senior class at the very end of the P-rade spills out on to Poe Field. So at this point they've been waiting for hours, in some cases, imbibing in alcohol, and it's hot and they're incredibly excited and they're young and they've got lot of energy. So they would spill out onto Poe Field and just run like crazy. And it got kind of dangerous and during Reunions where it was muddy, there would be sliding in mud and slipping, and people were falling in the mud. It was crazy and uncontrolled.

It was so uncontrolled that at least a couple times the class or a big part of the class would literally run by the reviewing stand, and not even stop. And you know, of course, what they're supposed to do is stop in front of the reviewing stand and hear some words from the President of the University and the President of the Alumni Association and sing Old Nassau. That's what they're supposed to do, but they would just run right by the reviewing stand. It was like, "We got to stop this."

So there were some attempts to try to prevent this from happening, but it only became effective when we had this idea, and I'll credit the staff of the Alumni Council for implementing it. We made these STOP signs on poles, these bright orange STOP signs. And we would put four or five staff members and Marshals at the right location on Poe Field where we knew we would have the entire class in front of the reviewing stand, basically. And we stationed them there just before the senior class entered and they would stand there with these signs and then they would hold these signs up. And one of the pictures I have of me up on my wall is of me holding on of these STOP signs the first time we used it. It said, "**STOP**" in big letters. And then we would spin the sign around. And on the back, it said, "**Welcome to the Alumni Body**," which is wonderful. And it worked ... it worked perfectly. So it's like, "Okay, that's a really good idea." Now, it's not going to stop some of the seniors from still running out, but at least they won't run by and not sing Old Nassau. That's a big thing that we did that probably a lot of people noticed.

A smaller thing we did that probably not so many people noticed involves the whole ceremony for opening FitzRandolph Gate, which is closed before the P-rade. There is the Grand Marshal who asks that the gate to be opened. And then there is a role that I think is a relatively new role called the Key Master. The Key Master is the person who's standing just inside the gate who actually opens the gate. Well, for a while the key was just a wooden stick that we shoved through FitzRandolph Gate. And it was actually so thick that one time it actually was hard to get it out. I think I had to reach inside to get it out. This is, I think, when I was a Flanking Marshal and I had to pull it out, because otherwise we weren't going to get the gate open. It was stuck, which hopefully is not something a lot of people noticed. So I said, "We should have a real key." So I suggested this and then some folks in Facilities or whoever fabricated it. It's not a just a key, but it's a nice piece with tigers on it. And it looks really old. So this tradition was created or at least the official key was created when I was Grand Marshal, which was rewarding.

Dan Abramowicz:

Excellent. I wanted to ask if you had any additional examples of ways the Marshals have had a positive influence on the P-rade. You have already mentioned several examples, like the water tanks so that all the nearly 20,000 people are hydrated and safe when it's sometimes very hot. The STOP signs to try to control the graduating class, because as you said, it's many hours of waiting and pent-up energy when that moment has finally arrived. That may be one of the most dangerous moments in the P-rade, in some sense. Are there any other examples that come to mind quickly? You've given me several already.

Daniel Lopresti:

Oh yes. I mean there are Marshals who know the P-rade like the back of their hand with specialized roles. So you might think that the Marshals are randomly assigned all across the route, but there are Marshals who specialize in helping with the floats. There are Marshals who specialize with front campus, which is its own micro environment, if you will, as different parts of the route actually have different challenges. And there are Marshals who know that this turn right here is always a problem, this specific turn. So there are Marshals who have got that knowledge embedded and who are unbelievable resources and without their awareness it would not go so smoothly.

The golf carts ... the golf carts are always a challenge. And Heather Butts, who's the Grand Marshal who followed me ... she's wonderful. Her specialty before she became Lead Marshal was the golf carts and there are famous stories of her pushing golf carts that broke down along the route out of the way and those kinds of things. So there are Marshals who specialize in getting the golf carts onto the route and going. As you know, there are dozens and dozens of golf carts in the front campus at the start of the P-rade. So it's this logistical cacophony that works because the Marshals are so excellent at what they do.

The one thing that I remember most vividly is the Marshals ability to improvise. So, improvisation and creativity, and just awareness. And I mentioned safety and that again is one of the key concerns. I remember the last year I was a P-

rade Grand Marshal was 2018 and it was one of the very rare P-rades where we actually had to cancel it. And that was actually after we had started. So the Old Guard had already marched. And the 25th class had swapped their place with the Old Guard. So the 25th would normally go first after the Vanguard, they had nicely allowed the Old Guard to go first. So the Old Guard had finished and the 25th class was in the middle of coming out onto Poe field.

We knew that the weather report was a little dicey, but you never really can tell. It's not rain that causes the P-rade to be canceled, but it is the danger of lightning, as you might expect. And I don't know if you recall, but there have certainly been lightning hits on the campus during Reunions. I remember a few years before this, when the APGA tent used to be near Whig Hall, and there was a huge tree near the tent. We showed up on Friday and the tree was gone and it had been hit by lightning the day before. And it just been split. So lightning can be incredibly dangerous.

That's what caused the 2018 P-rade to be canceled after it had started. We had started, we'd already gotten about 45 minutes into it. And the official word came, "It's got to be called. It's got to be called right now. Everyone seek shelter." Now, as you know being a Marshal, we actually prepare for this. During the morning discussion, the breakfast, there's always a discussion. "Okay, bad weather, this is what happens. If it gets called off, you'll hear about it this way." It's not just rain, it's the danger of lightning. So we have to take it very seriously. It's not just like, "Oh, I don't mind getting wet." It's, "No, this is really dangerous because it's lightning that's within a certain radius." And there's a certain magical radius. It's not just someone's looking at weather.com on their phone. There is an official policy about when the P-rade gets called because ... and I forget whether it's five miles or something ... there has been a lightning strike within five miles, something like that.

Cancelling the P-rade was very disappointing. And obviously that became the moment where the Marshals shown like I've never seen. Because now we've got some 20,000 people who are maybe not aware of what's going on, and the Marshals spread out along the route. The Marshals ... and obviously the professional public safety officers are also involved, but they were helping everyone find a safe place to be, because this could be very dangerous. And I was just incredibly impressed and heartened, by the way the Marshals responded to that situation.

There was a little bit of chaos, obviously you can just imagine. It takes hours to get the P-rade set up. And we had basically to get everyone safe within a period of a few minutes. And I can't tell you again and again, it was obviously a tremendous disappointment to have it called off, but uplifting to see the Marshals rise to that occasion. And the reason they did it was not because we practiced it. We talked about it, but we don't practice it. But just because of their experience and their awareness and their dedication, they knew what to do. I think it turned something that could have been very dangerous into

something that became a very positive light on the Marshals and the role they play in the success of the P-rade.

I don't know what happened with you at that time. I was stuck down on Poe Field, which was interesting because there was a spontaneous P-rade after the danger of lightning ended and a few classes came down and they marched, even though it was incredibly wet, which is pretty cool to see. And I was down there with Gregg Lange, which was special because that was also his last year as the P-rade announcer, which was cool. So he and I were down there together, but there were spontaneous celebrations inside some of the buildings. So people took their P-rade inside Alexander Hall, for example. And they had a little bit of a celebration in there. That happened in a bunch of places around campus, which is pretty cool. So that's certainly a situation where the Marshals shown. We can't control the weather, but I was incredibly proud just to say we helped take this potential big negative and turn it into something that was safe for everyone, and where at least people could have some of the enjoyment, even though we couldn't have the P-rade.

Dan Abramowicz: That's a great bit of history to capture. And not only does it focus on the key role of the Marshals, but also on the way that they have to be as flexible as possible, because you can't predict what's going to happen. You'd spend a lot of time planning, but that particular P-rade with the lightning storm was rather unique. And I'm glad that you were able to recount that history for us.

Just a final question. Is there anything else you'd like to add that we haven't had a chance to talk about, that you wish I'd asked you about, or anything else? You've already done a great job of giving me some very valuable information and history.

Daniel Lopresti: I just want to tip my hat to the Alumni Council staff. I mean, they're amazing. The Marshal Corps, of course, are all volunteers. We're alums, but without the staff helping us, I think it would be an insurmountable task. Dan, you've seen them in all the roles they play, and they're just wonderful. And they're like magic because each one of them does the work of five or six people during Reunions. And I'm always impressed by that.

The other thing, of course, we're facing a situation now where we've not been able to have Reunions or a P-rade for a couple years because of the pandemic. It's incredibly special to me ... I'm sure it is to you too. And I'm really missing it. I think it's the thing that I've missed the most because of the restrictions. And I just hope as we start to roll forward with all the precautions that will need to be in place now, that we're able to have something like the experience that we had before, to be able to recreate it in its new form in a way that everyone enjoys it, and again, it's safe.

Obviously it looks like a daunting task to restart something as large as the P-rade after it's not been held for a couple years. The virtual P-rade is a nice thing, but we all really want to be on campus in person, clearly. So I'm looking forward to



that. I've got my fingers crossed. Anything that you and I can do and others can do to help it be successful. But I can't tell you how much I'm looking forward to being back. I mean, it'll be part of the process, I think, for a lot of us to recover from the pandemic ... when we actually are on campus and say, "Oh, okay. We've made it. Still a lot to worry about, still a lot to be concerned about, but we've made it."

Dan Abramowicz: To that end, I think the next in-person P-rade will be a particular challenge. And I've heard someone use the analogy that it may be something like the post-war P-rade.

Daniel Lopresti: Yes.

Dan Abramowicz: Because there could be so many people who want to come back, because they haven't had this opportunity and they missed their 5-year Reunion or their 10<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup> or 50<sup>th</sup> Reunion. So it'll be an extraordinary event, I think, once we do it again. But it's going to require those Marshals to be as flexible as possible.

Daniel Lopresti: It's daunting to think about. You mentioned postwar. Of course, that was incredibly important time in the history of the university, indeed in the history of the world. I will say that I'm pretty sure the campus was probably not too much smaller at that time. So you could fit, and the alumni body and the student body was smaller for sure.

Dan Abramowicz: Yes.

Daniel Lopresti: So you could fit all those people on the campus. Now, I mean, one of the huge challenges is we were already bursting at the scenes before, and you can only imagine what'll happen if 20% more people want to come or 25% more come. I hope we can accommodate everyone who would like to be able to make it back and can make it back, and accommodate them safely. That's the other challenge, obviously. So yes, this is going to be a real challenge ... a miracle, but a miracle I hope happens and anything I can do to help the miracle happen, I'm happy to be involved. But it's going to be a lot of work.

Dan Abramowicz: Well, Dan, thank you again for your willingness to help me do a bit of research for this project. I really do appreciate your time, your perspective, and some of the history you've helped to bring forward. So thank you and great to see you again.

Daniel Lopresti: Thanks for doing this. I think this is a great thing and I look forward to the time you and I can be face to face again, on campus.

Dan Abramowicz: Likewise. All right, Dan, take care.