

BENGAL LANCERS IN SOUTHBRIDGE:

AO Sponsors Mummers In Community's Sesquicentennial



Curtis Steur, captain of the Ferko String Band, demonstrated the "Mummers Strut" down Main Street in Southbridge. Steur was elected captain after Joseph Ferko, founder and captain of the band, died in 1964.

SOUTHBRIDGE — It was like someone had run 20,000 volts of electricity under every street in Southbridge! Suddenly, the small New England community came alive with a drama remindful of "Derby Day" in Louisville or "500" Day in Indianapolis.

But this wasn't for just one day. Rather, it was the start of a huge nine-day Sesquicentennial Celebration in which hundreds of AO people closed ranks with hundreds of other residents to stage an unprecedented event marking the town's 150th Anniversary.

Beginning with the coronation of the Sesquicentennial Queen, Miss Nancy DeAngelis, an AO secretary, the celebration thrust forward with a firemen's parade, a Panorama with 300-member cast, a carnival, a soap-box derby, dancing, ceremonies and countless other events.

The biggest attraction, however, was a mammoth Sesquicentennial Parade on May 22. Some 240 units marched along a winding 4-mile parade route to the appreciation of an estimated 85,000 spectators. Southbridge ordinarily has a population that barely reaches the 20,000 mark.

The parade was filled with floats, bands, marching units, and special features. But the highlight of the day, and probably the event that will be remembered the longest, was the appearance of the world famous Ferko Mummies Band of Philadelphia.

American Optical sponsored the Mummies in the celebration. As the band displayed the renowned "Mummies Strut" along the parade route, cheering crowds surged into the streets to get a closer look at the sea of white plumes and red Bengal Lancer uniforms. After the parade, AO sponsored a live concert by the Ferko group on the local football field. More than 3000 people crowded into the grandstands and overflowed onto the field to hear the unmistakable music of the Mummies.

The fact that AO and hundreds of its employees vigorously participated in the Sesquicentennial Celebration of Southbridge was to be expected. More than a century of AO tradition is deeply rooted in the community, and the Company and Southbridge have enjoyed an excellent relationship forged from common experience and mutual goals.

If AO's "home" is anywhere, it has to be Southbridge. . . The Company's world headquarters are here; the largest AO manufacturing complex in the world is here; it's the largest firm in the community, employing the greatest number of people; and most importantly, AO had its humble beginnings here, just 17 years after Southbridge received its charter in 1816.

Over a year's labor went into the celebration. AO employees played major parts in serving on the Sesquicentennial Committee, in working with local civic organizations, in marching in the parades, and in the Southbridge Panorama — a show that depicted the history of Southbridge from its first settlers to today's "a go go" generation.



The Ferko Bengal Lancers were preceded down the parade route by a 7-foot replica of AO's "Lancer" frame, carried by four local students.



Nancy DeAngelis, an AO secretary, reigned as Queen for the nine-day celebration.

50 members of AO's Fire Brigade appeared in two parades in as many days.

