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Lynwood youngsters highstepping their way to '84 Olympic games

By Ivan Crosbie

They call themselves the "Elegant Ladies" and the "Sophisticated Gents."

Their goal is to become the best drill team in the state. But for now, they are content to work hard, to train hard, to make drill techniques become second nature so they can achieve their first

major objective—to participate in the drill team parade during the 1984 Olympics.

To observe them in training behind Lynwood Natatorium in the city's park is to see youngsters, girls and boys from ages 10-15, exerting pride, enthusiasm, courage, discipline as they move their bodies rhythmically to the beat of drums. They gather here three times each

week for practice. They come from various locales in Lynwood and as far away as Compton Monday and Wednesday evenings and before noon on Saturdays.

What these youngsters have in common is that not one of them has ever been on a drill team before, but they are willing to give it their "best shot."

They are minority youths. They are youths from disadvantaged homes who, otherwise, would not have had the privilege of becoming a part of a team that could instill pride and motivate them to do their best.

"My oldest daughter didn't want to be on the drill team," said Joyce Johnson, secretary-treasurer of the Elegant Ladies organization.

"But now she can't wait to get to practice."
Since her daughter joined the team, Johnson explained, she has "learned how to discipline herself, how to work with others and a host of drill team techniques."

"Now she is co-captain of the team," Johnson, who joined the organization when it was formed in October 1982, has two daughters in it.

Not everyone sees his/her childhood dream come true. But Debra Washington, founder of Elegant Ladies and Sophisticated Gents, is one exception.

Washington has had an obsession from childhood to someday form a successful drill team.
This dream materialized last year when California Cablestems, the cable company that serves Lynwood, Downey, Bell Gardens, Santa Fe Springs and Paramount, donated approximately \$1,600 to get the team underway.



Elegant ladies

Members of the Elegant Ladies Drill Team, one of Lynwood's newest live attractions line up in formation during a recent practice session. Members of the team drilled to the beat of the Sophisticated Gents' drums behind the Lynwood Natatorium.

Also sponsoring the team is the Concerned Citizens of Lynwood organization.
Joyce Henry, coordinator of marketing for Cal Cablestems, said "it's going to be a lot of fun watching them (team members) grow up."

She said that Washington's idea is "fantastic that the team members are hard workers, and they're going to expand eventually."

CCL's executive director Benito R. Miranda, who plays an active part in helping to bring about things for the team, said they want to have a maximum of 85 girls on it.

Currently, the team consists of about 45 members. Their objective is to have 12 male drummers and six banner carriers.

Washington, who presides over the board of directors of the Elegant Ladies, said the organization has a five-member board.

In addition to Washington, there is a vice-president, a historian and a secretary-treasurer.

Although the team is Lynwood-based, the organization will not turn away any youth from neighboring cities who has a desire to join the team and meets its requirements, Johnson said.

These requirements include coordination, age, and willingness. Before one can become a full-fledged member of the team, he or she is required to pay a \$20 registration fee, Johnson explained. This is an annual fee. Additionally, the youngster must pay 50 cents per month.

The registration fees, according to the secretary-treasurer, pay for the team's insurance and purchase gloves for each member.

But the "dues are used to buy extra things," she explained, "such as earrings, belts and to pay for field trips."

Currently, the team's uniform is basically red and white. Each girl member is attired in a red ballerina skirt, white leotard and white boots.

This will not be the team's permanent outfit, however. In the not-too-distant future, Johnson said, they plan to change the current uniform to red and white tuxedos.

Though Lynwood city government is not an official sponsor of the team, Johnson indicated that the parks and recreation department provides various types of assistance.

It is the only drill team in Lynwood that is sponsored both by Cal Cablestems and CCL. And according to Johnson, "It started out with nothing, just people willing to help Debra realize her dream."

The team has already made its debut in a major way during the recent "Walk for the Blind." It began in Gardena and ended at the Redondo Beach Pier.



Sophisticated musicians

Members of the Sophisticated Gents, Lynwood's drill team drummers, demonstrate their technique during a practice session in the city's park. The workout was in preparation for their debut in the recent "Blind Man's Walk for Awareness" parade from Gardena to Redondo Beach Pier.