

Steve Tolopka – The Beat Goes On!

Editor's Note: Steve told and wrote his own story showing not only a great transition from engineering to retirement, but a great talent as a writer!



Former Senior Principal Engineer Steve Tolopka retired from Intel Labs at the end of 2010 after nearly three decades with the company. He can't figure out why on earth people ask him "Are you enjoying retirement?"



Ready to take the field at the Northwest Association for the Performing Arts Marching Band Championship

Steve joined Intel in 1981 as a systems software engineer with a Ph.D. in Computer Science from Purdue University, becoming chief architect of the Intel 80960XA processor's capability-oriented, fault-tolerant, distributed operating system and earning an individual Intel Achievement Award. In 1988 he became part of the team that formed BiiN, Intel's joint venture with Siemens AG, to further develop and market 80960XA-based systems. Steve's first lesson that "great technology isn't enough for great products" hit home when BiiN was dissolved just fifteen months later.

After rejoining the "Intel mothership" as part of the group that over time became Intel Labs, Steve worked as a manager and individual contributor at various points of his career. His professional background at Intel Labs includes Computer Supported Collaboration, videoconferencing technology, networking technologies including the WinSock 2 specification, usage models and

technology enablers for the Digital Home, and improved PC manageability, where he landed a second Intel Achievement Award as part of the team that created the Wired for Management Baseline Specification. He retired as Director of Trusted Platform Research at Intel Labs, responsible for creating and driving fundamental improvements that better enable trusted applications and services on Intel Architecture platforms.

Steve has a long-running interest in improving career paths for technical women, co-chairing the National Center for Women & Information Technology's Workforce Alliance on behalf of Intel from its inception in 2005 until his retirement. He says he's "inordinately pleased" to have received a post-retirement award from Intel when it was named the 2013 Top Company for Technical Women by the Anita Borg Institute.

If you knew Steve in the 80's, you may remember him as one of the lunchtime jugglers who traded clubs and other flying objects on the lawn of Jones Farm 1. These days, he mostly juggles musical organizations.

“My wife, Janet, and I played in bands all through high school and college,” he says, “But we kinda stopped after we left school. Then in 1992 we went downtown to see the Grand Floral Parade, and in the parade was this huge crazy all-adult marching band. We looked at each other and said ‘I want to do THAT!!!’”

That moment rekindled what has become a second career as a musician. He ticks the groups off on his fingers: “I play tenor sax with the Second Wind Jazz Big Band and One More Time Around Again Marching Band, baritone sax with the rock ‘n’ roll group Treble in River City, and clarinet with Portland Community Wind Band. But the group that gets the lion’s share of my time is The Beat Goes On Marching Band.” TBGO, as Steve calls it, is an all-adult marching band dedicated to reliving all the best parts of the marching band experience and the attitude that “We may be a marching band, but we’re more likely to play Lady Gaga than John Philip Sousa!” Besides marching with the band, Steve is the group’s president, music director, webmaster, and occasional music arranger. “It’s not a full-time job,” he says, “but some days it feels like it!”



Playing for young fans in Vancouver, BC

The band performs about 25 times a year at events around the Portland area, but also casts a wider net. In the last two years, Steve has led the band in performances on a cruise ship, in the Bahamas, in Vancouver (British Columbia), and at the Calgary Stampede. Last year, TBGO became the first marching band to open a session of the Oregon Legislature, adding a whole new meaning to “Rocking the House.” In February, the band performed for a million watchers in the San Francisco Chinese New Year Parade, and this summer they head to Bristol, Rhode Island for the nation’s oldest continuous Fourth of July celebration.

Amazingly, those aren’t even the biggest performances of the year. In September, TBGO travels to the People’s Republic of China to appear in the Shanghai Tourism Festival. Tolopka explains: “The Festival’s theme changes every year. This year’s theme is marching bands, and we have the honor of being the sole band representing the United States.” Over 9 million people attended the Festival’s events last year, and the Opening Grand Parade reaches a television audience of 200 million. “Yeah, it’s a little scary,” mused Steve, “but this is where thirty years of Intel training kick in and we’ve got a team that can execute. Besides, we’re not like other bands; we measure success by the number of smiles per mile!” Still, he says, “It takes dough to blow, and we’d love help from our readers who can make the dream real!” Visit the band’s [website](#) to learn more about how to get involved.

Though band gigs and keeping the organizations humming keep them busy, Steve and Janet still find time for travel. “And we’re collecting baseball stadiums,” Steve volunteers. “I think we’re up to thirteen so far, and we plan to catch a game in Fenway Park when we head to New England this summer.”



Steve offers a few tips for retirees: “The time to start preparing for retirement is long before your last day. And I’m not talking about retirement accounts and health care and all that jazz – Intel people are smart and they’ll figure all that out. The really important thing is to start growing your other interests, the part of you that isn’t Intel, the thing that will become your ‘second act,’ the thing that you’ll wake up thinking about in the morning.” Although, he admits, it’s pretty pleasant when that morning wakeup no longer happens before 7 AM.

You can catch up with Steve at steve@tolopka.com. “Or,” he says, “check out the performance calendars of the many bands and drop by for a show. Even better, dust off your horn and come out and play!”

