



2027 Member Handbook

President's Welcome

Welcome to Winter Sky!

Winter guard is an experience that can be hard to describe to others. Certainly, there is the 'performing arts' aspect. There is the beauty of perfectly timed spinning and tossing of colorful flags and equipment. There is the thrill of entertaining an appreciative audience through excellence in performances and competitions.

You will understand tradition and honor. You will learn valuable life lessons that will stay with you forever. You will experience the value of teamwork, respect, work ethics, discipline, dedication and camaraderie. You will develop friendships and bonds that will never be broken, and that will stay with you wherever you go.

Welcome to the family!

Harry Eldridge, Jr.

President of the Board

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Winter Sky 2027 Schedule

For 2027 we will be using TeamSnap to allow for easy viewing and planning of our schedule. Although the schedule can change throughout the season, for 2027 we have planned to rehearse weekly on Sundays beginning in September. We start our competition season in January, and finish at the Mid York Color Guard Championships in April. Apart from our show and rehearsal schedule, there may be additional performance opportunities and parades along the way.

Attendance

All members are expected to attend all scheduled rehearsals, competitions, parades, and exhibitions. Winter guard is a highly competitive activity, and the organization expends a great deal of time, energy and funding to put the guard on the floor. All rehearsals are critical to the development of the type of program that Winter Sky Independent wants to achieve for the members and our fans. Attendance is crucial to that process.

Members agree to attend all rehearsals. Excessive absenteeism hurts the entire organization. If members find themselves in a situation that will require that they miss a significant number of rehearsals or hours during rehearsals, the member should speak with the administration. The Administration and Staff review all extenuating circumstances to derive a fair decision.

Conflicts

Attendance is of paramount importance for any group of people to accomplish goals and achieve a high level of excellence. Academic events constitute acceptable conflicts. Valid excuse for absences will be allowed if the director(s) and staff are notified prior to becoming a member of the organization. Any short notice school conflicts must be relayed to the staff as soon as possible. All personal time (such as vacations) should be scheduled to avoid conflicts with rehearsals and performances.

If you have a conflict with your school activities during a camp or rehearsal weekend or other scheduled event, you should attend the school event, and then do whatever is possible to attend the rest of the camp or rehearsal. **We do expect you to give priority to Winter Sky for our competition day rehearsals and shows. We can provide assistance in getting excused**

absences for those dates. In the event of absence, it is important to find out what was missed, and to make every effort to be responsible for that material before returning to the next rehearsal.

Communication

Two-way communication is vital to any organization. Emails, texts and phone calls may be sent out from the Administration and Caption Heads. Postings are also done through TeamSnap. Members agree to read, understand and respond when needed to all communications.

We have an administration team that will respond quickly to any questions or concerns you may have.

Below are important email addresses:

Aaron Brown – Board Member

aaronbrown@winterskycg.org

Brittany Eldridge – Program Director

brittany@winterskycg.org

Harry Eldridge – Administrative Director

harry@winterskycg.org

Practice

Members are expected to practice at home between rehearsals in order to learn and memorize all work, and personally improve their expertise on the chosen piece of equipment. Rehearsals are for REHEARSING. The more you practice at home, the better rehearsals will be. In some cases, staff may assign specific practice tasks required by members during the week.

The Staff reserves the right to change any member's position within the guard as necessary to benefit the program, or to reflect other personnel changes that may have taken place. Should a change be necessary, the staff will communicate with the member personally, and try to accommodate the member to their satisfaction to the extent that it does not take away from the guard's performance level.

Member Dues

The member dues for the full season are tentatively \$850. Comparatively in the activity, that is a very competitive fee. Our full season starts with winter camps and rehearsals. We have several options for members to assist them in satisfying their obligation before the end of the season. Fundraising, scholarships, and payment plans are only some of the options we can

provide. The guard is committed to providing a valuable experience to everyone, and the administration will work with you to develop a personal plan to satisfy your dues before the deadline.

Other Costs

Meals at rehearsal. Meals are the responsibility of the member. On rare occasions, the guard may provide meals. A small fee may be requested to help cover the costs.

Transportation. Transportation to rehearsals and performances are the members' responsibility. Many members use ride share programs or carpools to defer costs. If you are setting up a carpool arrangement, please be courteous and offer help with fuel and other travel expense to decrease the cost for everyone.

Housing. While there are rare cases where arrangements are made for the entire guard to stay together, housing is the members' responsibility. We will have preferred hotel arrangements that provide low costs, especially when shared. Don't be afraid to talk to your fellow members if you need assistance with weekend housing.

Guard T-Shirt and Uniforms. As part of your dues, you will receive a member t-shirt for the season. Uniforms and flags are provided and included in your dues. Members may have other additional costs related, particularly with regard to personal items of their uniform, such as tights or other garments. Shoes and gloves can be ordered through the guard if needed at a discount.

Forms

Each member (whether returning or a new member) must fill out and sign the following forms: Handbook/Conduct Acknowledgement, Medical Release Form, and Financial Obligation Agreement Form as part of their contract. For members under 18, parents/guardians must co-sign for the member. A copy of your known conflicts will be required. A form will be handed out at the beginning of the audition series to communicate conflicts to staff. These conflicts will be taken into consideration as part of a contract offer.

Medical Form

If an emergency arises, it may be difficult to reach either parents or other family members in order to give permission for treatment. **HOSPITALS WILL NOT TREAT A PATIENT WITHOUT CONSENT.**

The Membership Medical Information & Consent Form authorizes the Winter Sky to seek emergency medical treatment on a member's behalf, and gives permission to any qualified health professional or hospital to give emergency treatment (including injections, anesthesia, or surgery, as needed) if the member is unable to give consent at the time of emergency. It also clarifies that the payment for any medical expenses undertaken on the member's behalf are not the responsibility of Winter Sky, but will remain the responsibility of the member and their insurer. In addition, without full knowledge of a member's medical needs or problems, we cannot be expected to adequately seek and provide care for a member. This information will be kept confidential and will travel with the guard to all functions.

If the member is under (18) years of age, their legal parent or purported legal guardian must also read and sign this Medical Information and Consent form.

WINTER SKY INDEPENDENT, INC. CODE OF CONDUCT

This Code of Conduct applies to everyone involved with the Winter Sky Independent Colorguard, including all participants, minor participants, groups, instructional staff, personnel, volunteers, and contractors. Everyone must follow this Code of Conduct to stay in good standing with Winter Sky Independent. The policies in this Code of Conduct aim to ensure safe environments and experiences during all Winter Sky activities.

This Code of Conduct explains what behavior is appropriate or inappropriate. While it cannot cover every possible situation, everyone must follow the letter and spirit of these guidelines to stay in good standing with Winter Sky Independent, Inc.

Definitions of Parties

- **Participant:** A person over 18 performing with a group.
- **Minor Participant:** A person under 18 performing with a group.
- **Group:** The entire organization or an individual participating group.
- **Staff:** A person engaged by the group in an instructional or administrative role.
- **Volunteer:** A person who freely gives their time to Winter Sky and provides support in any capacity.
- **Contractor:** A person who provides occasional services for a fee.

Winter Sky Independent will not tolerate conduct that violates its policies. Even if an action was not intended to violate this Code of Conduct, Winter Sky prioritizes the actual impact of the action over the person's intentions to prevent negative experiences.

In addition to upholding this Code of Conduct, Winter Sky Independent can review and may take interim action against anyone involved in or accused of unlawful activities related to their participation in Winter Guard or the marching arts.

All parties should consider themselves ambassadors of Winter Sky Independent. They are expected to uphold these policies, remind others of them when necessary, and report alleged violations.

Alcohol & Drug Policy

All parties have the right to participate in an environment free of alcohol, drugs, and other substances. Prohibited substances include narcotics, inhalant drugs, and over-the-counter medications unless used with a valid medical prescription. Violations include, but are not limited to:

- Distributing alcohol and prohibited substances to any participant.
- Consuming or being under the influence of alcohol or a prohibited substance while under the participating group's supervision or providing services to parties in connection with any event or activity, including rehearsals.
- Possessing or distributing alcohol or a prohibited substance on school grounds or arena facilities where such activities are prohibited.

Please note, while cannabis is legal recreationally in New York State for persons of age, we must adhere to the rules of each facility that we are at. Schools prohibit smoking of any kind on premises. We will also be traveling to and through other states that may not permit the use and possession of cannabis. Local laws will apply.

Exceptions to this policy may be made on a case-by-case basis by group administration to allow alcohol at specifically sanctioned social and fundraising events. At such allowable events, local regulations are expected to be followed. Prohibited substances remain forbidden at all times.

Anti-Retaliation, Whistleblower, and False Reporting Policy

Winter Sky Independent, Inc. will not tolerate retaliation against any party who makes a good faith report or threatens to make a good faith report. Retaliatory actions include threatening, intimidating, harassing, coercing, or any other action that could dissuade someone from reporting misconduct. Retaliation does not include good-faith actions lawfully pursued in response to a reported violation.

Any participant knowingly making a false allegation will be subject to disciplinary action. A false allegation differs from an unsubstantiated allegation, which means there is insufficient evidence to determine whether an allegation is true or false. An unsubstantiated allegation alone is not grounds for a Code violation.

Bullying Policy

Bullying means severe behavior directed at a participant that is aggressive and likely to hurt, control, or diminish the participant emotionally or physically often centering around a real or perceived power imbalance. Examples of bullying include repeated physical, verbal, or social abuse. Physical abuse may refer to hitting, pushing, beating, biting, or other offensive contact. Verbal abuse may refer to ridiculing, taunting, name-calling, intimidating, or threatening to cause harm. Social abuse may refer to using rumors or false statements to diminish someone's reputation or socially excluding someone and asking others to do the same. Bullying may occur in person or virtually through any social or electronic mediums.

Bullying does not include occasional instances of rude or mean-spirited language, conduct arising from a conflict or struggle between persons with incompatible views or positions, or professionally accepted coaching methods of skill enhancement, physical conditioning, team building, appropriate discipline, or improved participant performance.

Confidential Reporting

Reports are to be made confidentially to a Member of the Board of Directors. Confidentiality means the board member will know the reporter's identity but will not share it unless consent is provided or if they are legally required to do so. Inaccurate or withheld information will limit the board's ability to conduct an inquiry and respond.

Fraternization Policy

Winter Sky Independent maintains a strong position on fraternization between all parties. Fraternization means any close personal relationship that goes beyond a professional working relationship and can include romantic or intimate relationships, excessive socializing, and favoritism. Examples include:

- Sexual or romantic relationships between staff/volunteers and minor participants are prohibited.
- Establishing a new sexual or romantic relationship between staff/volunteers and adult participants while working with the same group is strongly discouraged. Additionally, establishing a new sexual or romantic relationship between any party where there is or a perceived power imbalance is strongly discouraged.
- Fraternization between participants and minor participants is strongly discouraged.
- Already-existing relationships between staff and participants are not encouraged but are not forbidden. These relationships must be managed to address potential conflicts or power imbalances.
- Any relationship that puts any party at risk of harm is prohibited.

General Conduct Policy

The experience of each party and the reputation of Winter Sky Independent depends on the conduct of all parties involved. Good manners, basic decency, and common sense are generally all that is required to ensure appropriate conduct and behavior. Engaging in conduct or using language that could be perceived as rude, inappropriate, abusive, disorderly, derogatory, immoral, or threatening will not be tolerated. Violations of this policy include, but are not limited to:

- Applying undue and unfair pressure to another party, especially if one party has authority over another.
- Verbally abusing any other party.
- Inappropriate conduct on the contest floor, rehearsal sites, or event venues.
- Disruptive or rude behavior anywhere, anytime during a group activity.
- Affiliates of the group, such as parents or spectators, engaging in inappropriate conduct directed at any party on the contest floor, rehearsal sites, or event venues.

Harassment Policy

All parties must maintain a safe, respectful, and inclusive environment. Harassment means repeated or severe conduct that causes fear, humiliation, or annoyance and reflects discriminatory bias to establish dominance, superiority, or power over an individual or group based on age, race, ethnicity, gender, orientation, culture, religion, national origin, mental or physical disability. Harassment also refers to conduct that creates a hostile environment. A hostile environment exists when the conduct is severe or pervasive enough to interfere with, limit, or deprive any individual of the opportunity to participate in any program or activity. Harassment may occur in person or virtually through any social or electronic medium.

Harassment does not include occasional instances of rude or mean-spirited language, conduct arising from a conflict or struggle between persons with incompatible views or positions, or professionally accepted coaching methods of skill enhancement, physical conditioning, team building, appropriate discipline, or improved participant performance.

Hazing Policy

Hazing means any conduct that subjects another person to anything that may endanger, abuse, humiliate, degrade, or intimidate them as a condition of joining or being socially accepted by a group, team, or organization. Consent by the person subjected to hazing is not a defense, regardless of their perceived willingness to cooperate or participate.

Hostile Rehearsal Environment Policy

The rehearsal space is where groups develop creative routines and foster teamwork. A rehearsal environment is defined as periods when the group is practicing under the direct supervision of an authority figure or coordinator. It is a violation of this Code for any party to engage in severe or pervasive conduct that hampers a party's ability to participate meaningfully in the rehearsal environment. Rehearsal environments should remain educational both in the planning and commentary provided to any party. When rehearsal techniques and feedback are no longer educational, a hostile rehearsal environment could be created. Conduct prohibited by this Code, such as harassment, hazing, and bullying, is also prohibited in the rehearsal environment. Additionally, violations of this policy include:

- Creating a rehearsal environment intended to make any party excessively afraid, nervous, or anxious regardless of intention. This does not include professionally accepted coaching methods.
- Withholding educational information to achieve skills safely

- Attacking the personal character of participants rather than aspects of their performance.
- Rehearsing for extended timeframes while withholding, recommending against, or denying adequate hydration, nutrition, medical attention, or sleep.

Sexual Misconduct

Sexual misconduct of any kind will not be tolerated. Offenses include sexual or gender-related harassment, nonconsensual sexual contact, exposing a minor to sexual content/imagery, and sexual exploitation.

- **Sexual or Gender-related Harassment:** Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, unwanted and continued sexual flirtations, and propositions. It also includes sexually degrading words and other conduct of a sexual nature.
- **Nonconsensual Sexual Contact:** Engaging in sexual contact without consent.
- **Exposing a Minor to Sexual Content/Imagery:** Intentionally exposing a minor to sexually explicit imagery.
- **Sexual Exploitation:** Taking non-consensual or abusive sexual advantage of another for one's own advantage.

Reporting Instances of Sexual Misconduct

If any party receives information suggesting sexual misconduct has occurred, they must report it to WGI immediately. Groups and Circuit Partners should report allegations of sexual misconduct to law enforcement. They must maintain effective policies and procedures for the protection and safety of all parties, including the ability to report suspected sexual misconduct without retaliation.

If any party learns of or suspects child abuse, including sexual misconduct, they must immediately report it to law enforcement, WGI, and comply with other applicable reporting requirements. Reporting to WGI alone is not sufficient.

Social Networking Policy

Winter Sky Independent values the freedom of expression on social networking sites and does not wish to discourage self-publishing or self-expression. However, we expect all parties involved in any capacity in with the group to follow the applicable guidelines and policies. It is important to understand that any posts made on social media are personal and do not

represent Winter Sky Independent. Our policy prohibits the use of social media to post or display comments that are vulgar, obscene, threatening, intimidating, harassing, or hostile on account of any protected characteristic under applicable law on platforms controlled by Winter Sky Independent.

Weapons Policy

To ensure a safe environment for everyone, Winter Sky Independent strictly prohibits the wearing, carrying, storing, or possession of firearms or other dangerous weapons at any of our events or event venues. Anyone found violating this policy will be immediately removed and barred from future events. Additionally, if the sponsoring circuit finds that the violator is a participant, staff member, or volunteer affiliated with a participating group, that group will be disqualified and asked to leave the venue.

Reporting Violations

Many times, reporting concerns can enable discussions and actions that can keep minor problems from becoming major ones. “Whistle blowing” and “see something, say something” are examples of terminology that reference such reporting. Seldom does discussion with other members help any situation or violation. We enforce a strict policy of investigation and action, and protection against any discrimination or retribution for anyone who files a report.

Violations of any the organization’s policies must immediately be reported to an administrator designated to handle concerns professionally and with discretion to insure the safety and security of our members and staff.

Parental/Family Involvement

Winter Sky **strongly** encourages parental and family involvement. This support is important not only to the individual member, but also to the guard as a whole. One of the most important aspects of the Winter Sky organization is the feeling of belonging to the “Sky family” and we warmly embrace each member’s family as well. Members whose parents/family know and understand the organization, the member’s responsibilities and scheduling tend to more successfully complete the season, and have a more fulfilling experience with the guard.

Family members are also encouraged to participate in Winter Sky, whether it be as a fan or supporter or by taking a more active role. If you want to get involved, please contact the administration.

What to Bring

The most basic things that every member needs are water and healthy food. It is important to stay hydrated and it is not a bad idea to pack electrolyte supplements such as Gatorade or Liquid I.V. Any over the counter medications that you may need such as Advil or Tylenol as well as prescription medications that you must have on you.

History of Winter Sky Independent Colorguard

Winter Sky was established in 1992 by staff and members of the New York Skyliners, Harrison Bushwackers, and Long Island Sunrisers drum and bugle corps. We were based in Garfield, NJ at the then home of the Skyliners, American Legion Post 255. The group was officially sponsored by the Skyliners and competed in the TIA (then known as NJA) circuit from 1992 to 1995 and was a founding member of the Mid-Atlantic Indoor Network (MAIN) in 1996.

From its inception in 1965 until the late 1990's/early 2000's, these drum corps competed in Drum Corps Associates (DCA) which was informally known as 'senior corps', meaning the members were generally over the age of 18, as opposed to Drum Corps International (DCI) which has an upper age limit. Because our membership was comprised of adults members of these corps, we competed in the senior division in both TIA and MAIN. We were the **senior division champions** every season that we competed until the guard went inactive after the 1996 season, corresponding with a sharp decline in membership in the Skyliners organization leading to the drum corps going inactive for a season in 1998.

There have been many discussions throughout the years of bringing the guard back under the Skyliners competition corps but none of the plans ever came to fruition due to the frequent changes in color guard staff. In 2023, the Skyliners moved their operations upstate to the Binghamton area of New York, utilizing local talent for their instructional staff.

In late 2024, it became clear that there was a shift happening in the Upstate NY color guard circuits and more performers were looking for independent groups to join. Alumni and former staff of the Skyliners saw the opportunity as a perfect time to resurrect the long dormant winter program. Charter meetings were held in December 2024 and the decision to restart the guard as its own unique entity was made. Corporation filings were done and the program was officially recognized as a corporation and 501c3 tax-exempt charity in February 2025.

Winter Sky became the MYCGC Independent A Silver Medalists in 2026

Today the guard operates as an Independent A Class group and will be competing in the Mid-York Colorguard Circuit (MYCGC) and Winter Guard International (WGI) in 2027.