

## Steven G. WEDGE

### CLAIM TO FAME

*Founder, president and CEO of COA Cheer & Dance; founding member of NCSSE and SITA*



In an ever-changing industry, COA Cheer & Dance founder, president and CEO Steve Wedge says the 22-year-old company's lasting success is due to its singular purpose. "COA is all about the people, and that's what's remained constant," Wedge says. "Customers always remark about how well my employees take care of them. And with only 14 people in the office, we have more than 200 years of combined cheer and dance experience—that says a lot!"

For Wedge, as a founding member of the Spirit Industry Trade Association (SITA) and the National Council for Spirit Safety and Education (NCSSE), as well as a

member of the U.S. All Star Federation (USASF) sanctioning committee and The Cheerleading Worlds advisory board, it's never just about his business. He's truly *involved* with all aspects of all-star cheer, from validating it as an industry to ensuring safety and ethics training for coaches and providing the best competitive opportunities and scholarships for athletes. In fact, the Shirley Wedge National Cheer & Dance Scholarship Fund (named after Wedge's late mother) has awarded approximately \$400,000 to cheerleaders and dancers to date.

His impact on the cheer world was evidenced when he was hon-

*"Steve represents all that's best about the spirit industry: integrity, enthusiasm and intellect. He sees beyond competitive differences to embrace collective benefit."*

—Gwen Holtsclaw,  
Cheer Ltd.

ored as a SITA Hall of Fame Inductee in 2007, something Wedge considers the zenith of his professional accomplishments. "I'm so proud and grateful that my

peers respect my work and commitment to this industry," he says.

Wherever he's involved, this former Ohio State University cheerleader cultivates an atmosphere of integrity, class and sportsmanship that's become synonymous with COA, all traits sometimes difficult to uphold in an ultra-competitive industry. "So many people in business believe you have to be hard-nosed and nasty to get ahead," Wedge says. "I believe the complete opposite. As long as you're fair and treat people with respect while being professional, you can achieve great things. At the end of the day, all you have is your integrity." —*MW*

#### **Q: What was the most significant event of last season?**

**A:** The economy. Sadly, gyms have been hit hard, and some have been forced to either go out of business or merge with others. This means there will be fewer teams to compete against, which isn't a good trend. Gyms need other gyms to survive so they can thrive.

#### **Q: Have you tailored your goals to reflect the economy?**

**A:** My goals are to provide a superior experience for athletes and parents at an affordable price. We've created the COA Freedom Pass, which allows teams to pay one price and compete with COA

as much as they want. There's a type of COA Freedom Pass to fit every budget.

We also have the JAM Rewards Express, which offers gyms up-front discounts based on their commitment to us at the beginning of the season—no more waiting for an end of season reward.

#### **Q: What do you think SITA and NCSSE have done to legitimize all-star cheer?**

**A:** SITA was formed to unite the industry under one organization so we could work together to make it better for everyone. We've accomplished a lot, and one of the best things is that we celebrate excellence and support one another.

NCSSE was developed to train coaches on every aspect of running a sound cheerleading program. It teaches principles and ethics before it ever touches on skill building. No other training program in the industry is doing this.

#### **Q: What do you hope to see more of next season?**

**A:** Sportsmanship! It's a lost art, and we need to place more emphasis on it. Unsportsmanlike conduct is damaging to everyone. Sportsmanship is about respect, and it has to start with the coach. Coaches must adhere to sportsmanship policies in the gym, at competitions and even outside of cheer. ★