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The Definitive History of Marco: The Mascot of Marshall University

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The Definitive History of Marco: The Mascot of Marshall University

Marshall University has a long and unique history, but perhaps the most endearing custom of the institution rests in its furry friend, Marco, the school's mascot. Initially nicknamed the 'Big Green', Marshall's idea of a mascot did not come to fruition until Huntington sportswriter Duke Ridgley coined the phrase the 'Thundering Herd' in 1925.¹ Later in the same year, football coach Charles 'Trusty' Tallman guided Marshall to its first win of the season. Headlines everywhere read 'Trusty Tallman's Thundering Herd.'² The headlines, along with Zane Grey's hit novel *The Thundering Herd*, popularized the term within the community. As such, Marshall needed a mascot that could thunder to victory and successfully lead a herd. Thus, the idea of a strong, determined buffalo was born.

During the early 1930s, Marshall students and fans got their first glimpse of a buffalo mascot. The costume was an oddly shaped buffalo created for two people to control. Although the costume was the first buffalo to appear in physical form, the image of a buffalo mascot did not appear until cartoonist Irvin Dugan put pen to paper. In the late 1930s, Dugan was the lead artist for the Huntington newspaper, *The Herald-Advertiser*. Although Dugan's iconic character, Adam, took center stage in most of his cartoons, his sports column frequently featured images of a buffalo and Huntington High School's mascot, the Pony Express. Several of the images depicted the buffalo running

¹ Cora Teel, "Sixty Years of 'Thunder': From Grey to the Eighties, Marco Endures," *Marshall Alumnus* XXVI no. 2, 1985.

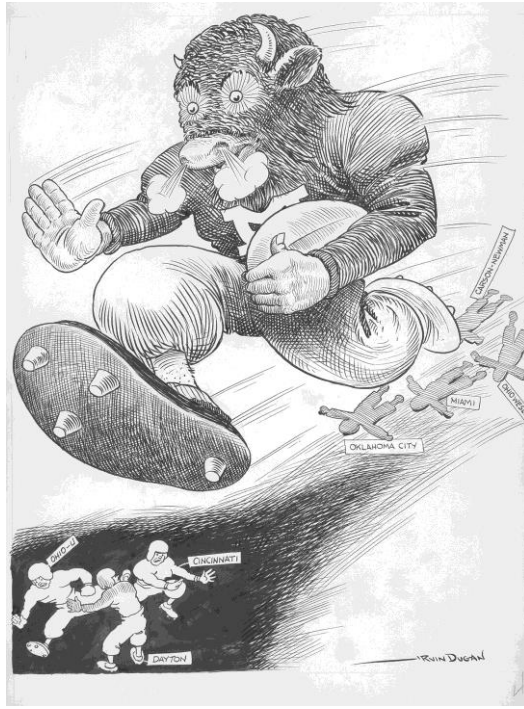
² "Trusty Tallman's Thundering Herd," *Marshall College News*, September 1925.

over the competition, celebrating a victory, and playing sports.³ Although Dugan's cartoons were the first illustrations of the mascot in print, the buffalo was only ever labeled as 'Herd' or 'Marshall', leaving his name a mystery for the imagination.



During the early years of Fairfield Stadium two students brought to life this oddly made Marco costume.

³ Irvin Dugan, *The Herald Advertiser*, October 16, 1938; November 28, 1937; February 20, 1938.



This Irvin Dugan cartoon depicts the Marshall mascot running over the competition. The image appeared in the September 4, 1938 issue of *The Herald Advertiser*.

After Dugan's cartoons, Marco remained dormant on Marshall's campus and within the Huntington community for many years. In 1951 an artist by the name of Dawson drew various cartoons of a buffalo roaming the pages of the Marshall College football brochure. The sketches depicted Marco leading the herd, drinking from a water hole, and running towards opposing players.⁴

⁴ *Herdlines...Marshall College Football Brochure 1951* (Huntington, WV: Marshall College, 1951), 12, 10, 23.



A 1951 Dawson drawing that appeared in the Marshall College Football Brochure. The image shows Marco leading the herd to victory.

It was not until 1954, however, that Marco reappeared with a new look and objective. John ‘Jack’ Carlsen and Vause Smith, editors of Marshall’s year book *The Chief Justice*, worked together with an artist to create a character that could wander through the yearbook. Derived from the term Marshall College, Carlsen and Smith produced a new image of the Thundering Herd buffalo, naming him Marco. ‘Marco drops out of the Thundering Herd and pays his respects to Marshall College’ was the header for the new yearbook. Throughout the book, Marco was featured performing daily routines such as carrying textbooks, playing football, and nervously knocking on a dean’s door.⁵ Overall, Marco appeared as more than a mascot for athletics – his new appearance depicted him as a student concerned with the academics of the institution.

⁵ John Carlsen and Vause Smith, eds., *The Chief Justice 1954* (Huntington, WV: Marshall College, 1954), 32, 150, 34.



This image of Marco carrying textbooks across campus appeared in the 1954 *Chief Justice*.

Marco continued to roam yearbooks and imaginations, but eventually appeared in physical form in 1965. The Robe, a men's honorary fraternity and 'booster' club purchased a buffalo costume for \$200 and used the outfit at various athletic events to boost school spirit among the students.⁶ Marco made his first appearance at the Marshall vs. Bowling Green basketball game on March 6, 1965.⁷ Although members of The Robe took turns donning the furry costume and tried to keep Marco's identity anonymous, Charles 'Flem' Evans was the first Marshall student to bring the buffalo to life.

⁶ Durward C. Brewer, ed., *The Chief Justice 1958* (Huntington, WV: Marshall College, 1958), 183; "Buffalo May Soon Trample MU Foes," *The Parthenon*, February 12, 1965.

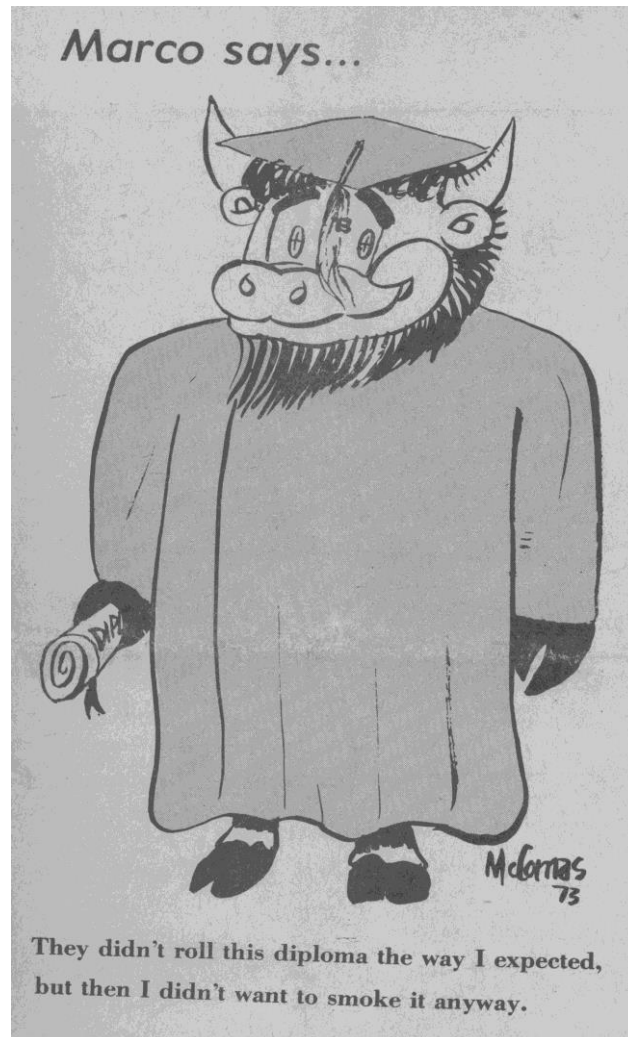
⁷ "Photographers Have Busy Day," *The Parthenon*, March 10, 1965.



In 1965 Charles Evans was the first student honored to wear the new Marco outfit. This image appeared in the 1965 *Chief Justice* and shows Evans in costume at the Marshall v. Bowling Green basketball game on March 6, 1965.

The 1970s was a great time of activity for Marco and his popularity increased. During the early 70s, Marco played a more prominent role in the school newspaper, *The Parthenon*. A cartoon artist by the name of Mark McComas sketched recurring images of Marco titled ‘Marco Says...’ that depicted the buffalo commenting on campus events. In the spirit of the 70s, in one sketch McComas cheekily had Marco holding his diploma with the phrase, “They didn’t roll this diploma the way I expected, but then I didn’t want to smoke it anyway.”⁸

⁸ “Marco Says...,” *The Parthenon*, May 2, 1973.



This humorous cartoon by McComas appeared in the May 2, 1973 issue of *The Parthenon*.

Not only was Marco present as a cartoon and costumed mascot, but in 1970 he also appeared as a live buffalo. Marshall first tried to get a live buffalo as far back as 1931, but the mascot had to be purchased from a ranch in Oklahoma and travel expenses could not be agreed upon.⁹ Dr. H.D. Proctor originally purchased the buffalo in the early 70's from a farm in Greenfield, Indiana and kept him at the fairgrounds in Lawrence

⁹ "If Plans Mature Buffalo Parade for W & J Sure," *The Parthenon*, October 7, 1931.

County, Ohio.¹⁰ By September of 1970, Dr. Willard Jinks and Julie Durkin had taken the four-and-a-half month old buffalo under their wing and trained him for half-time performances.¹¹



A young buffalo being prepped for a halftime performance on September 28, 1971.

By Homecoming of 1970, the live Marco appeared in his first Homecoming parade.¹² Although Marco had been trained to walk around Fairfield Stadium, the buffalo eventually had to be kept in a special trailer due to rambunctious behavior. Marco was

¹⁰ Roxanne Williams, "Marco Found 'Grass' Not to His Taste: Marshall Mascot Almost Had Owners 'Buffaloed,'" *The Parthenon*, November 21, 1975.

¹¹ "Marco in the Flesh," *The Parthenon*, September 22, 1970.

¹² "Marco in First Homecoming Parade," *The Parthenon*, October 27, 1970.

soon purchased by Camden Park manager William Henry Nudd and kept at the park, where he lived peacefully and was loaned to Marshall for home football games.¹³

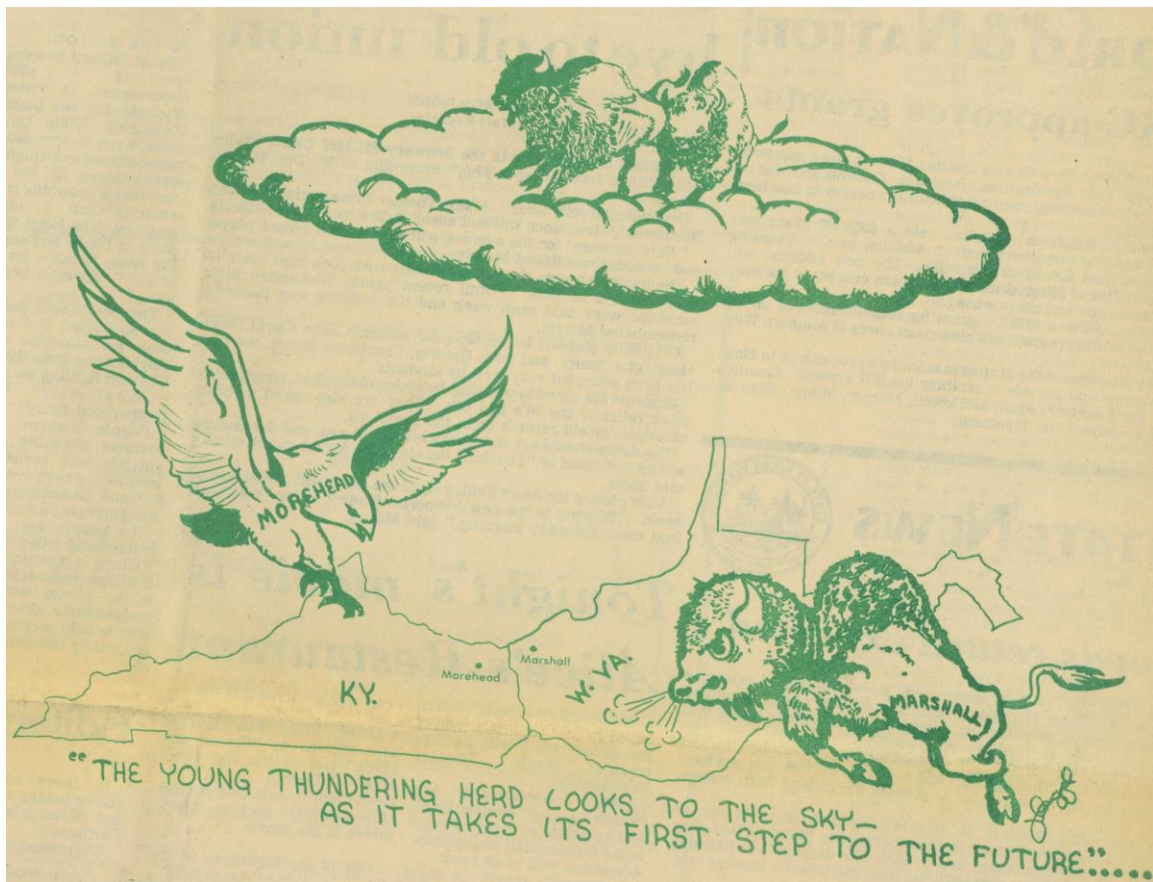


Marco in his special trailer after becoming too rambunctious at football games.

After the devastating plane crash of 1970, a new logo for Marco was created by Jack Carter. In 1971 Carter revealed a herd of buffalo running with the title 'New Young

¹³ Roxanne Williams, "Marco Found 'Grass' Not to His Taste: Marshall Mascot Almost Had Owners 'Buffaloed,'" *The Parthenon*, November 21, 1975.

Thundering Herd.’¹⁴ Football coach Jack Lengyel responded by illustrating a young buffalo storming towards Marshall’s upcoming rival, the Morehead State eagles with a cloud of buffalo watching from above. Lengyel paid homage to the deceased players, staff, and family members that perished in the plane crash. He titled his artwork “The Young Thundering Herd Looks to the Sky as it Takes its First Step to the Future.”¹⁵



Jack Lengyel’s inspirational artwork after the 1970 plane crash decimated the Marshall football program.

¹⁴ “New Young Thundering Herd Logo,” *The Parthenon*, August 17, 1971.

¹⁵ “It’s Time to Play Football,” *The Parthenon*, September 17, 1971.

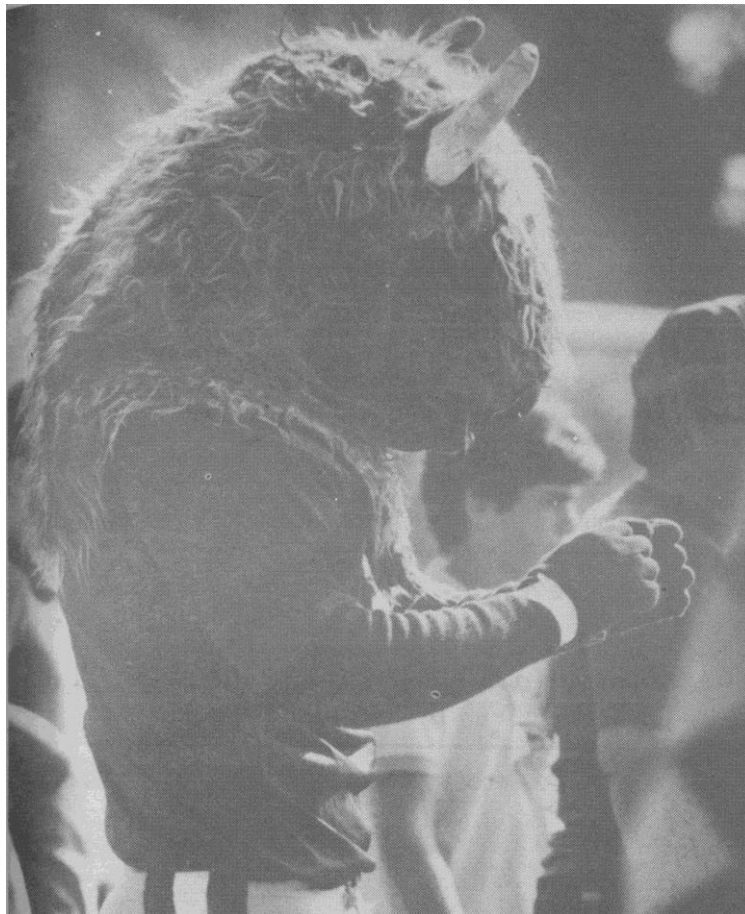
By 1973 Marco had a new companion to keep him company, a female buffalo named Marsha. Although the mascots were friends, Marsha only lasted a few years after her arrival (It is speculated she transferred to West Virginia University).



Marsha cheering on the sidelines at a Marshall football game in 1974.

Marco soon recovered from his heartbreak with a new athletic look. In 1984 Marco received a makeover after his old costume from 1965 began to deteriorate. The new costume resembled a football uniform and had limitations concerning crowd

interaction due to its cost of \$2,500.¹⁶ Although swelteringly hot, Matthew Igou, Marco from 1984-86, was still pleased that the costume allowed him to aid the cheerleaders. Igou commented on his teamwork with the cheerleaders stating, “I would be one lonely buffalo grazing out there if it weren’t for the cheerleaders.”¹⁷



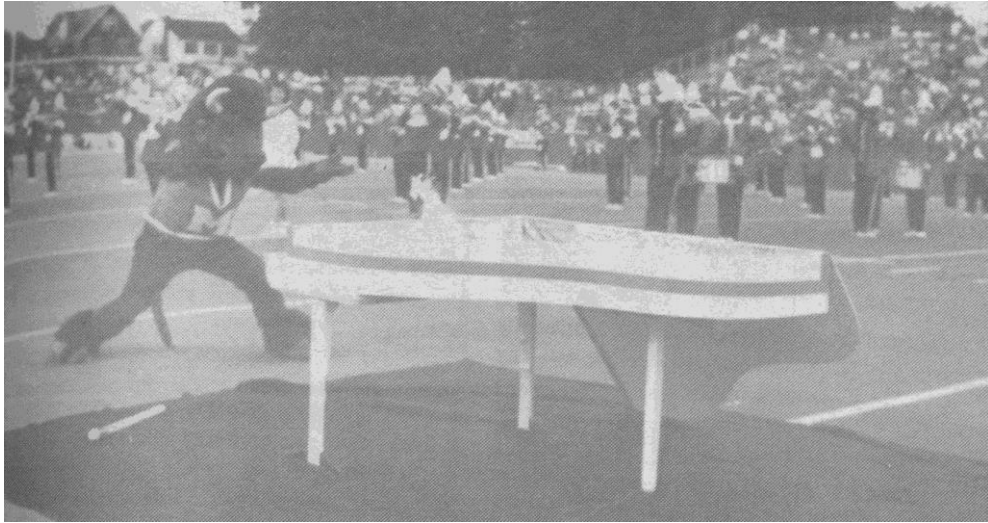
Matthew Igou premiering the new athletic Marco costume at a football game in 1984.

In 1990, Marco was a leading competitor in the Universal Cheerleader Association’s mascot competition in San Antonio, Texas. Allen Young, Marco from 86-91, stampeded into the competition’s final four and received a scholarship from

¹⁶ Amanda M. Tully, “Where the Buffalo Roam,” *The Parthenon*, November 2, 1999.

¹⁷ David Miller, “New Look for an Old Herd Fan: Marco Gets More Athletic Look,” *The Parthenon*, October 30, 1984.

Marshall's Athletic Director, Lee Moon.¹⁸ Not only did Young reach the final four, he finished first in the national mascot competition.



Allen Young performing his famous 'Great Balls of Fire' routine as Marco.

With the help of Wayne High School art teacher, Keith Osburn, Young constructed a flammable, mock-up baby grand piano. Young and Osburn rigged an electric fan inside the piano and lined the inside with Christmas lights and cellophane. When Marshall's cheerleading adviser, Chris Yaudas, plugged in the fan, the piano burst into flames.¹⁹ To put the cherry on top, Young performed this dangerous act to Jerry Lee Lewis' 'Great Balls of Fire.' Marco was crowned King of Bull at Marshall's last home basketball game by Osburn and his wife.²⁰

¹⁸ "Herd Hero Stampedes Into Mascot Final Four," *The Parthenon*, April 6, 1990.

¹⁹ Robert Saunders, "Herd Mascot Defeats All In National Competition," *The Parthenon*, April 10, 1990.

²⁰ Melissa D. Keith, "Mascot, Fan Friendship Built with Cardboard, Tape, Paint," *The Parthenon*, April 27, 1990.



Marco was crowned King of Bull by Keith Osburn and his wife at Marshall's last home basketball game in 1990.

During Homecoming of 1999, a Marco reunion was held to celebrate the endearing mascot. Although family members had been the only people privileged to know who lies behind the mask, eighteen of the previous Marcos reunited to reminisce and shed their anonymity.

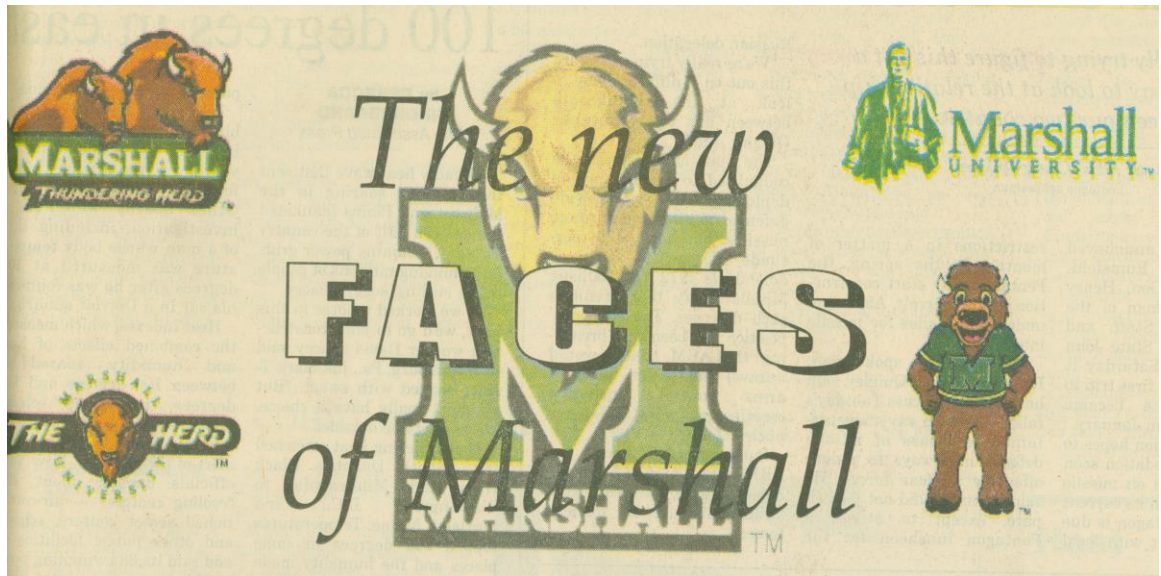


Left to right: Bryan Clark, Alvin Jewell, Thomas Perry, Scott Ramey, Allen Young, Matthew Igou, Jeff Sias, John Hutchison, James Stewart, James Ferguson, Tony Miller, Jim Niehaus, Mike Carroll, James Summers, Tom Rodriguez, Michael Farrell, Rick Jackson, Craig McElhinny, and Charlie ‘Flem’ Evans. Photo courtesy of Marshall University Alumni Association.

The reunion’s activities included a banquet at the Athletic Hall of Fame, a campus tour, the Homecoming parade and lunch, and an introduction of the mascots before the game. The reunion and festivities truly showed Marco’s involvement within the community and in Marshall’s public affairs. Sam Stanley, the assistant vice-president for Alumni Relations, stated that, “Marco is a great ambassador and symbol for Marshall. This doesn’t apply only to athletic teams, but the whole university.”²¹

In 2001, Marshall altered Marco’s appearance for a more ‘determined’ look. Five new images designed by Phil Evans were revealed to a crowd in the Joan C. Edwards Playhouse. The new images included a kid-friendly, smiling Marco, a John Marshall logo, the new determined Marco, and a buffalo herd.

²¹ Amanda M. Tully, “Where the Buffalo Roam,” *The Parthenon*, November 2, 1999.

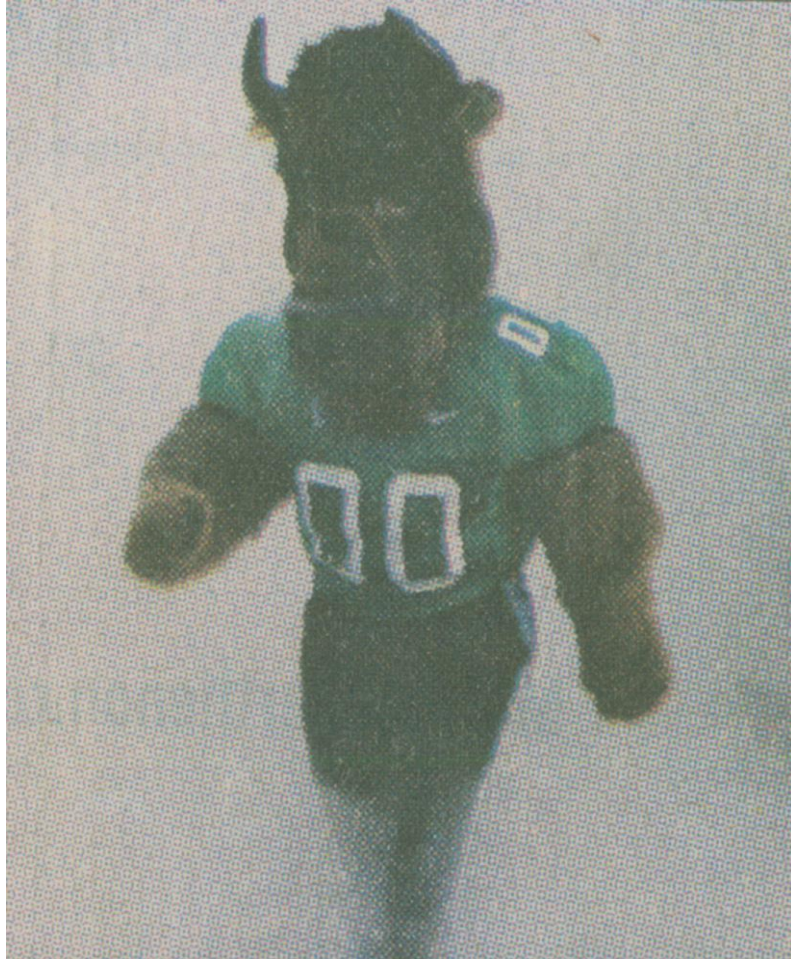


The new logos that premiered in the fall of 2001. These images appeared in the August 9th, 2001 issue of *The Parthenon*.

The new images replaced the 70s Marco logo that wore an unexplainable sailor cap and blew smoke out his nose. A fan commended Evans for creating an official logo that included more than one buffalo stating, “A herd is more than one buffalo and it is hard for one buffalo to successfully thunder.”²² Marco received yet another makeover in 2008 when his costume became much more muscular. The new Marco was designed to promote a healthier image, described as ‘working out’ and ‘taking care of himself.’²³ Although this incarnation of Marco was received well by kids, public opinion was not on his side.

²² “New MU Logo Emphasizes Marco Instead of Marshall,” *The Parthenon*, August 9, 2001.

²³ Tom Bragg, “New Marco Not Making Good First Impression,” *The Parthenon*, November 19, 2008.



The muscular and healthier Marco emerging from fog machine smoke at a football game in 2008.

In the summer of 2013 students, alumni, and Herd fans had the opportunity to vote for a new Marco costume from among three options: current Marco (remake of the 2008 costume), partial makeover, or full makeover.²⁴ With 76% of the votes, voters overwhelmingly selected a full makeover, yearning for a new costume that resembled the

²⁴ Tiffany Bajus, "Herd Fans to Choose Marco Costume from Among Three Concepts," <http://www.marshall.edu/pressrelease.asp?ID=3196> (accessed July 1, 2014).

classic Marco from the 90s.²⁵ To Marshall fans' delight, the new Marco costume was revealed during the Homecoming game on October 5, 2013.



From July 24 - August 10 of 2013 Marshall fans voted on these three options for a new Marco costume.

²⁵ WSAZ News Channel 3, "Herd Fans Make It Clear They Want 'Old Marco'," <http://www.wsaz.com/news/headlines/34524734.html> (accessed July 1, 2014).



The new outfit was revealed in the fall of 2013 by Dr. Allen Young, who reprised his role of Marco in a white lab coat. Photo courtesy of *The Herald-Dispatch*.

As of 2014, the coveted role of Marco will be filled by two students – Makenzee Ruley and Tristan Bowen. Both students will receive a \$2,000 scholarship, \$1,000 for textbooks, their own parking space, and a personal trainer at the Marshall Recreation Center.²⁶ Although possession of Marco used to belong to the cheerleaders, he is currently owned by the President’s office and only ‘borrowed’ by the cheerleaders for sporting events.²⁷ Today Marco can be seen roaming the sidelines during athletic events, attending ribbon-cutting ceremonies, and participating in student events and functions. Marshall’s furry friend will continue to have a winning and captivating aura within the Huntington community for many years to come.

²⁶ “Room for Two: Students to Fill Role of Marshall’s Mascot,” *The Herald Dispatch*, May 23, 2014.

²⁷ Sarah Stiles, “Marco: Then and Now,” *The Parthenon*, June 12, 2014.



The current costume design will feature Makenzee Ruley and Tristan Bowen as Marco for the 2014-2015 season.

The Definitive History of Marco: The Mascot of Marshall University written by Katherine Endicott with special thanks to the staff of the Marshall University Special Collections Department for their helpful assistance.

Extra Marco Photos



Marco starting the wave at a 1990 football game.²⁸



Marco performs the Heisman pose next to Randy Moss, 1997 Heisman Trophy nominee.²⁹

²⁸ *The Chief Justice 1990-1991* (Huntington, WV: Marshall University, 1990-91), 154.

²⁹ *Marshall Football 1997* (Huntington, WV: Chapman Printing Co., 1997), 36.



Marco paying a visit to John Marshall.³⁰

³⁰ *Marshall Basketball 99-00 Media Guide* (Huntington, WV: Chapman Printing Co., 1999-2000), 16.

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For more information on Irvin Dugan's cartoons, see the Irvin Dugan Collection (Accession Numbers 1974/07.0071 and 1979/07.0258) in the Marshall University Special Collections Department.