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NEW MEXICO STATE UNIVERSITY
DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI
COLLEGE OF ARTS
AND SCIENCES

SGM MIKE CANO, US ARMY (RETIRED) '93



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Sergeant Major Mike Cano, U.S. Army (Retired) '93 has played trumpet before popes and presidents. But his greatest honor is having played Taps more than 15,000 times at Arlington National Cemetery — an honor entrusted only to those who can dependably deliver a flawless performance.

“This changed me,” Mike says. “It’s a strange feeling to do your best, but it not being about you. You are there to serve the family. That’s important, and it changed me, knowing that.”

Long before, when he was 12 years old, Mike’s first trumpet came from White’s Music Box in his hometown of Las Cruces, NM. “I loved music, I practiced all the time, and I got better. In junior high, I was the tiny kid with a trumpet beating out the seniors for first chair.”

On a full music scholarship to NMSU, Mike had planned to be a music teacher. Then he ran across a solicitation for applications to play trumpet in The U.S. Army Band, “Pershing’s Own” prestigious ceremonial band. He applied and was invited for a personal audition — one of 15 out of 300 applicants for one spot. His mentor, Dr. Ken van Winkle, was on sabbatical, so Mike prepped for the audition by himself. “That audition was one of the hardest things I’ve done in my life,” says Mike. “They sent an overwhelming list of music to prepare. I rode my bike to campus at 7 a.m. and practiced 11 hours every day for three months.”

He made it to the final five. And then — another spot opened and was offered to him. Soon after, Mike began Army Basic Combat Training, graduating with honors as platoon leader.

During his 30-year career with the U.S. Army Band, Mike toured the globe; played for seven presidents, two popes, Queen Elizabeth II, and Nelson Mandela; opened the Bill Clinton and George W. Bush presidential libraries; performed with the world’s greatest symphony orchestras and entertainers; welcomed leaders to three G8 summits; heralded the re-lighting of the Statue of Liberty in 1992; and was awarded two Army Commendation Medals, two Meritorious Service Medals, and the Legion of Merit.

In 2017, he was promoted to sergeant major and appointed Group Leader of the elite Herald Trumpets, the official fanfare ensemble for the U.S. president. He was one of two Eb Sopranos, which requires absolute perfection on every note, every time.

In 2020, Mike retired and came home to Las Cruces, where he still makes himself available to play Taps and is a member of the Mesilla Valley Concert Band. And — he’s working at White’s Music Box, where he bought his first trumpet, as an educational consultant, mentoring young people about opportunities in music.

Mike has practical advice for students: “You can do it. My friends in the Army Band were from The Juilliard School, Eastman School of Music, and Ithaca College School of Music — and there I was, from NMSU. You will be successful if you love what you do — but you need to practice. You’re not going to want to practice. But learn to love it and appreciate how people notice you getting better.” ▲