



BIG CHIEF CHORUS
SMOKE
SIGNALS



Pontiac/Waterford Chapter
Meetings on Tuesdays: 7:30 to 10 PM

Bulletin #44, November 30, 2004

“FAMILY”

It was Saturday night, November 6th, at 6:30, when early-birds began filtering into the Clarkston High School Auditorium seats, catching sight of the actors on stage showing members of *Insignia* where to stand and what to say, while *Musicality* was looking for a little mike time, and as other quartets were moving around and through the band instruments, and people were yelling directions and questions thru the auditorium. Yikes! Would we pull this off when the curtains opened in less than one hour?

Well, we did. The 60th annual Barbershop Harmony Show of the Big Chief Chorus has come and gone. Under the direction of Jim Troeger, and in tribute to John Smith, the chorus presented “**Family**,” a musical exploration of the theme that barbershop singing can bring happiness and a sense of Family, even to down-in-the-dumps salesmen, marooned in a small town suspiciously similar to “River City.”

The Dixie Land Band with guest soloist Eileen Marshall warmed up the crowd. Then the show opened with a disappointing performance by the Clarkston High School Barbershop Chorus (things could only improve). Emcee Jim Owens barked bravely, “on with the show.” As barber Jeff Doig swept up, townie John Cowlshaw questioned business, but Jeff assured him that the new hotel was providing lots of walk-in business – “traveling salesmen types.”



Sure enough here came Zaven Melkonian from New Orleans, and Dick Johnson from St. Louis, to “ding-dongs” from the chorus. Responding to their melancholy loneliness, Jeff has them sing a tag, “Those Two Eyes of Blue.” Downright embarrassing how good it makes them feel. And it reminds Zaven of his Cajun childhood memories (as BCC sings “Darkness on the Delta”) and then of his old quartet (Jackpot sings “Hush”). When the memory vanishes, John draws more singers from town (Four Wheel Drive sings “Each Time I Fall In Love”).

Jeff takes “a little off the top” of Dick’s well-coiffed wig, sending hair flying and Dick reminiscing about his St. Louis childhood (BCC sings “Old St. Louie”). At the thought of their separation the next day, Dick dreams of starting his own quartet (B Natural sings), which makes him feel so good that he directs the whole chorus in “I’m Sittin’ on Top of the World.”

Now a third salesman arrives, Art Carinci from New York, (“Dinga-Donga”) who “no feels too good,” and is snarly that Jeff mis-reads his briefcase legend as “Tony” instead of “To N.Y.” The barbershop quartet’s musical “hello” at least gets him to open up to wondering what they sounded like 30 years ago, which *Impresario* promptly demonstrates. But it’s all a little too sappy for “Tony” and he recounts the glamour of New York, Broadway, and vaudeville, to which BCC sings “Back in the Old Routine.” It’s been a great day and they feel like family.

Just then four town kids arrive, and the barbershop group ponders the next generation. Will they value singing and family? Jeff offers to try them out, and they, of course, being *Insignia*, respond by offering the audience a highlight performance.

After performances by additional guest quartets, Infinity and Musicality, the chorus returned for “New York, New York,” “Aint Misbehavin’,” and “Show Business.”

The evening concluded with a winding drive to Shepherd’s Hollow Golf Club, for a Brede-designed afterglow of hors d’oeuvres and singing.

AROUND THE PATCH

Christmas Chorus



With the conclusion of the fall show, attention turns to the Christmas season. Attendance has been great, supplemented by a number of Christmas singing guests. The Bari section has been richly blessed, with the return of Gil Carlisle (recently retired from GM Engineering), Ryan Moore (works as a youth specialist), John Dementia (a retired engineer and general contractor), and Dave Shantz (a child psychologist from O.U.). George Moore (a licensing manager at Delphi) has been singing Lead. Mike Garrison has returned as Tenor and Don Place (retired Oakland Schools administration) and Tom Burder (Ford engineer)

as bass, and also George Newton. May they all give serious consideration to continuing with us after Christmas; we’ve got some great singing voices in this group!

Officer Installation and Awards Ceremony

What a great evening! Over fifty of us singers and partners gathered Friday, Nov 19, at the Cass Lake Roadhouse restaurant to thank the 2004 officers, install the 2005 officers, and present awards of thankfulness to chapter members who have furthered the chapter this past year and helped to raise the “quality bar” of our chapter. Our old friend Russ Seely did the installation. He spoke movingly of his long association with Pontiac/Waterford, and his admiration for our maintenance of traditions, including the yearly shows and the annual Woodshed Contest.

The Barbershopper of the Year award went to John Cowlshaw, who responded with a hoot of appreciation. The Rawley Hallman Music Award was presented in absentia to our director, Jim Troeger, whose ill daughter kept him at home. The William Pascher Founders Award was presented to Dick Johnson. And Prez Pete spoke movingly of his desire to institute a new President’s Award, which was given to Walt DeNio.

Then the SilverDomes sang for about 25 minutes. It was so good to see John Wade ... back on his feet and singing with Russ Seely, John Wearing, and Gene Bulka. Their singing may have dropped a notch; all the more reason to admire their enthusiasm, their long-time camaraderie and their 200 years of combined barbershop experience.

Our new auxiliary group, the Big Chief Chicks, were present of course, with an enthusiastic pronouncement from Joan Cheyne, Barbara Workman, and Jan DeNio, urging wives and partners to join the Big Chief Chicks at their next outing, Feb. 9th.

From the Prez:

Volunteers: Looking for two volunteers to chair **Valentines Singouts** and **2005 Show**

COTS: 8 of our Board members will be attending the COTS program, Jan 8-9

Christmas Sing Out: A huge thank you for organizing the schedule to: Bruce Brede, Roger Holm, Walt DeNio, & Tom Jackson.

Officer Induction and Awards Dinner: A huge thanks to Dick Johnson for arranging a great evening!

Board Meeting Schedule: Except for Jan 16th, all meetings will be on the 2nd Wednesday of the month.

Fall Contest Photos: If you ordered one, Jeff Doig has yours for \$9. AV tapes of the fall show, unfortunately, won’t be available.

MEMBERSHIP (at 56)

New Member: Dave Bartilson

Renewals: Tom Ford (3)

Non-renewal: Jerry Howington

Birthdays: Stan Mersino (5th), Chris Elmore (13th), Jack Teuber (15th), Howard Lynn (18th), Mike Frye (23rd), Zaven Melkonian (26th), Jim Owens (28th), Len Barnes (Jan. 3rd)

BSOM – November – Howard Lynn and Lew Mahacek, for their work on the show

December – Tom Jackson, for his work on the cast party

MEET ROSS ENSIGN

Ross Ensign was born in 1943 and brought up in tiny Long Point in central Illinois. His dad farmed the family farm until he became too ill. The family



included his two sisters (Ross was the tall one in the family). But the big influence in Ross's early life was his Aunt Rose Ensign. She was the matriarch, an old maid schoolteacher, who taught the 1st and 2nd graders for 45 years, and who instilled in her family the importance of learning both a musical instrument and a trade. Beginning in 2nd grade, Ross played the recorder, the cornet, the French horn, the baritone, and finally the G-flat tuba (the wrap-around type) in the high school marching band. (He had tried vocal music also, but the director had told him not to bother.)

Ross left home at 17 to attend Brown's Business School in nearby Peoria IL and a first job under a boss who became like a 2nd father to him.

His second job took him to K-Mart in Peoria, IL, a relationship that lasted 38 years, though in several separate careers, including accounting specialist, operations manager, systems director, and comptroller in the merchandising

division. During this time, the geography of his career included Lafayette, IN, Salt Lake City, UT for five years, St. Louis, MO for five years, and Freehold (in central New Jersey) for 19 years. On Black Monday, December 4th, 1994 he escaped the first K-Mart crash by being re-assigned to the Troy, MI headquarters. Finally, in the 3rd reduction, April 2003, he opted for a forced retirement from K-Mart.

Ross was married and divorced in his 20s, a casualty of retail hours. He met Karen in 1969 while she was hitchhiking during a westward trip. They have been married for 33 years and have two children, Todd, who teaches educational technologies in Morgantown, WV, and Tania, whose marriage to a Greek in Athens last year afforded the family a to-talk-about excursion.

Ross's hobbies include hunting, carpentry, mechanical things, and computers. Since leaving K-Mart, he has begun a Handyman Service, and has not been without work since starting it. However, he admits to enjoying being able to schedule the work when he wants and not have to maintain regular work hours.

How did Ross get into barbershop? Well, Ross and Karen had gotten active in the Presbyterian Church in St. Louis, and when they moved to Freehold, NJ, they were invited to join the church choir. After a couple weeks, a fellow bass, Tony Eng, was impressed enough to invite him to the Monmouth Battleground Barbershop Chorus. It had just won its first Intermediate Championship the previous year and went on to repeat in eight of the following ten years. Ross held positions of president, membership VP, show chairman, and program VP during his 20 years of Barbershopping experience and assisted in several tape programs to support the choruses.

When K-Mart re-assigned him to Troy, he looked around for a chorus, visited Grosse Point, Pontiac, and City Lights, but joined the Rochester chapter (encouraged by the fact that they met at the same Presbyterian church that he and Karen were attending). He remembers fondly that Smitty physically hauled him down to City Lights after meeting him at the Pontiac Chapter in early '95. Later, in 2001, growing disenchanted with Rochester, he joined Pontiac's Big Chief Chorus, crediting the Xmas chorus program for leading him there.

He had been part of a quartet in Freehold, NJ, so when he joined Rochester, he quartetted with Tom Blackstone and Tom Tailford and several leads, including Rudy Krampf and Lyle Howard. But things didn't jell until drafting Jeff Doig as Lead, and they sang as **Harmony Knights** for several years.

Ross has contributed mightily to the Pontiac Waterford Chorus, including work on choreography and currently on the Music Committee and as Tape/CD librarian. He strongly supports the tape/CD learning program that is being maintained by our current music committee.

AGING

While waiting for my first appointment in the reception room of a new dentist in our town. I noticed his certificate, which bore his full name. Suddenly, I remembered that a tall, handsome boy with the same name had been in my high school class some 45 years ago. Upon seeing him, however, I quickly discarded any such thought. This balding, gray-haired man with the deeply lined face was way too old to have been my classmate. After he had examined my teeth, I asked him if he had attended the local high school.

"Yes" he replied.

"When did you graduate?" I asked.

He answered, "In 1956. Why?"

"You were in my class!" I exclaimed.

He looked at me closely, and then the s.o.b. asked, "What did you teach?"

EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING Excerpts, from Bill Holmes

November 11, 2004

Attendees at Overtyme Grill: Pete Mazzara, Gene Downie, Jeff Doig, John Cowlshaw, Ron Clarke, Walt DeNio, Wayne Cheyne, Zaven Melkonian, Ted Prueter, Dick Johnson, Jim Troeger, Roger Holm, Jack Teuber & Bill Holmes.

Dick Johnson, treasurer, reported a current balance of \$11,737. Dick submitted a detailed report showing income and expenses since Oct. 14, 2004, with the accounting still incomplete regarding the show activities.

Roger Holm reported the music committee has selected fourteen songs from which eight will be selected for the 2005 show. Roger stressed that our show defines our chapter and thus deserves our utmost in planning and execution. He also said that "entertainment quality" should guide our selection of guest quartets.

Walt DeNio reported receiving 16 requests for gigs within a six-month period, 13 of which were honored.

Jim Troeger reported he received favorable feedback from show attendees and he felt the show came together nicely on the songs sung by the chorus. He is encouraged and he is developing plans for the chapter.

Gene Downie reported he is waiting on committee reports before he can submit his final report; however, he prepared a show schedule for 2005 which, even though amended, will improve the planning and enhance the performance, the props and the sets.

Jan. 8 & 9 Chapter Officers are planning to attend COTS

Pete will request volunteers to chair the 2005 show and the Valentine sing-outs.

It was suggested to request the Big Chief Chicks to assist in activities such as the raffle and ushering for the show.

Software Helps Singers Find Perfect Pitch. Check out this NPR story at <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4153600> A number of computer programs can correct pitch to make just about anyone sound in tune.

CHAPTER LEADERSHIP (2004)

Director: Jim Troeger

(248-853-4360)

Assoc. Directors: Dick Johnson, Bruce Collins

President: Pete Mazzara

(313-563-4026)

Past President: Gene Downie

VP: Chapter Dev: Jim Owens

VP: Music and Performance: Roger Holm

VP: Marketing & PR: Walt DeNio

Secretary: Bill Holmes

Treasurer: Dick Johnson

Members at Large: Jack Teuber, Zaven Melkonian

Chorus Manager: Art Carinci

Music Team: Roger Holm, Johnson, Collins, Doig, Ensign, Melkonian, Prueter

Bulletin Editor: John Cowlshaw

Music Librarian: Ted Prueter

Singing Valentines: Wayne Cheyne

Sunshine (Chaplain): Walt DeNio

Uniforms Manager: Ron Clarke

Tape/CD Librarian: Ross Ensign

YMIH: Jack Teuber

Calendar

Nov 30, 6:30 Christmas Singouts begin, Sunrise

Nov 30, 7:30 BCC Rehearsal, Crary

Dec 4, 5:00 Lake Orion Candlelight Parade

Dec 5, TBA UAW, Walton Blvd in Pontiac

Dec 7, 6:30 OC Medical Care, Lakeland Place

Dec 9, 1 pm Silver Lk Golf Club

Dec 14, 6:30 Lourdes Fox Manor, Inn at Cass Lk

Dec 17, 7:30 Canterbury on the Lk

Dec 18, 12-6:15 Bus Tour

Dec 21, 6:30 Independence Village

Dec 21, 6:30 BCC Christmas Party, Ind. Vill.

Jan 4, 7:30 BCC Rehearsal, Crary

Jan. 8-9 COTS @ Okemos

Jan 16, 3pm Exec Bd Meeting, Jim Troeger's home

Jan 24-30 BHS Midwinter Convention, Jacksonville

July 3-10 BHS Convention, Salt Lake City