



## SMOKE SIGNALS



### Bulletin #14, June 18, 2002 Pontiac Waterford Chapter SPEBSQSA

And on the Web at [www.PontiacChapter.com](http://www.PontiacChapter.com)  
Big Chief Chorus Sings: Tuesdays, 7:30-10:00  
Location to be announced

**IMPORTANT NOTICE!** We have lost our Tuesday night rehearsal site, at Crary Middle School. Look for further information as to where rehearsal will meet, beginning July 2.

#### MEET OUR DIRECTOR

A cold rainy Saturday following Windsor Send-Off seemed like a good morning to go visit Chris Miller, sip hot coffee, and talk about his life in music. "I was born in Washington, DC in 1950, delivered by an ObGyn who also directed the National Capital Chorus (1954 Champions). My mom always said I came by barbershopping naturally." But his mom was not musical and his dad didn't get into Barbershopping until his retirement. Instead Chris's early involvement in music consisted of attending shows in the 60's with his family, at the Watergate band shell and Constitution Hall in DC. And Junior High glee clubs, where he felt the first sense of what harmonic singing might feel like, a feeling left unsupported in his high school years in Frederick, MD, and his college years at Shepherd College in West Virginia. By 1976 his dad was in the Frederick Catoctones, and invited Chris to join him in the bicentennial singing celebrations. When Chris got his first job, with Avemco, an aviation insurance company, and moved to California, he carried this interest with him and joined a 30-man chorus in Santa Clarita, in the San Fernando valley. Here he learned that

singing could be fun, and joined his first regular quartet, "Vocal Vibrations," (1978-9).

When he took over Avemco's Rockford, IL office, he found a dispirited local SPEBSQSA chapter with 26 guys, under a mechanical director, meeting in a dimly dark Shriners' Hall. By joining forces with some other men to form the quartet, "Mother's Mistake," and the nucleus of a reform movement in the chapter, membership grew to 48 on stage under a new director, and they won the small chorus contest in Illinois. Meanwhile, he began singing with a more serious quartet, Popular Demand, which won the Novice Quartet honors in the Illinois district in 1981. (Its tenor, Marty Jahnel, went on to sing with Chordiac Arrest.)

In 1982, Avemco moved its main office to Frederick, MD, and Chris rejoined the Catoctones. Being in three choruses taught him a lot. Then to Chicago, his wife's hometown and a lukewarm participation in the DuPage chapter. In 1988, he moved alone to Michigan, lived downtown and began scope-ing out chapters for a serious reinvolvement with barbershop. He settled on the Grosse Pointe chapter, and formed a comedy doo-wop quartet with Mark "Kingfish" Davidson, called "Kingfish and the Mystic Knights of the Sea." This quartet entered a Lever Bros. contest that won the local, and a trip to Universal Studios for the finals, where they came in 3<sup>rd</sup>, and learned to never compete against acts with animals and small children. "I've still got videotape of Duane X Riley interviewing us, wrapped in towels, singing in a bathtub."

At Grosse Pointe Chris was Program Vice President and planned the warm-ups, polecats, etc, which he began directing. He also sang with the Milford chapter in its dying days and when Sunnyside came over to possibly unite the dwindling forces of Milford and Pontiac, Smitty saw Chris directing polecats, and conversations began on Chris coming to Big Chief. "I insisted that I first meet with President Bob Woodward and the Board and we did six weeks of strategizing. That was in July '97, and when I started directing on Sept 13, there were 8 guys; the next week was guest night and we had about 40 people at the Administration Bldg at Airport Road and Pontiac Lake Road. Our goal was 22 men on stage at Spring District Contest, which we just barely made, and finished last, and felt good nevertheless; we were on our way."

Chris's son, Ryan, now 17, is an occasional visitor to our chorus. Chris and Nancy live in Commerce Twp. Chris supports Nancy's involvement in dog shows (with their award-winning Afghan, Isis), while Nancy supports Chris's Barbershop involvement (serious enough to have included nine trips to International!).

I asked Chris about the biggest "names" he's met. Musically? "Wayne Newton wanted a couple of guys from our quartet as backup in his Las Vegas act. Tenor Jack Messina and I were on a golfing vacation, so it was Kingfish and Coz that spent a couple weeks doing that. But later I met him. Our quartet also sang on Dick Purtan's "Cruises for Women Only" in the Detroit River, and we'd warm up the women before they went into the lounge for the Chippendale

dancers' show." Aviationally? "Bill Lear, Greg and Sam Williams (Williams International). A lot of others too because of selling aviation insurance. I insured Dick and Burt Rutan (the pilot and designer of Voyager that circled the globe in 1986 on one tank of gas)."

Chris has such a wonderful BBS tone and flexible style (and breath control – ask those who've been held out to dry) that I asked Chris about his musical talents. "I don't have perfect pitch. I didn't have early musical training. I sing by ear. I couldn't even hear harmony for the first ten years; I'd just learn the parts. Then in St. Louis, in '83 or '84, a prize-winning quartet invited me in as fourth man, and suddenly I couldn't hear my own voice, it was just an experience that felt like my hair being swept back. I thought, Wow, this is expanded sound!"

When you are listening to the chorus, what are you listening for? "It's a problem; I can't do it all, I need to structure what it is that I am listening for." When you look crossly at us, what are you thinking? "It can be very frustrating, but I'm also learning to keep it light. After all, this is a volunteer organization."

## AROUND THE PATCH

### MEMBERSHIP

**Renewals:** Dave Willett (2), Jack Teuber (3), Irwin Mann (3), Art Ripley (5), Yong McDowell (7), Neil Braun (13), Jerry Twomey (21), Bill Dabbs (32), Don Sheridan (41). Membership at 58.

**June Birthdays:** Bruce Brede (22<sup>nd</sup>), Al Monroe (24<sup>th</sup>)

**July Birthdays:** Tom Jackson (1<sup>st</sup>), Chuck Murray (6<sup>th</sup>), Bert Cederleaf (21<sup>st</sup>)

**BBS of Month, May – Jeff Spires**

**Illnesses:** Len Barnes is undergoing another chemotherapy regimen. Bill Pascher had a pacemaker installed.

**Mel Parrish** and **Bill Nevaux** performed in **Classic Chorale**, May 19.

**Harmony Way** (Mike Keith, Bruce Brede, Jeff Spires, Chuck Murray) has been busy, singing several places. The **Walk for Epilepsy** has become a Big Chief tradition – Sunnyside sang for several, High Octane in 2001, and Harmony Way this June 1. They also sang Friday noon, June 14, at **Lourdes Mendelssohn Center**.

**A Cappella Fellas** (Al Monroe, Wally Plosky, John Cowlshaw, Zaven Melkonian) practiced hard for three weeks prior to an open-air gig Friday evening, June 7, at "Savvy Showhouse Preview Party," a fundraiser for Lighthouse Community Development in the Unity Park neighborhood in southeastern Pontiac. The new home modeled "affordable housing." Its yard had been sodded just two days earlier, allowing tables to be set up under a large tent in the yard. The quartet opened the evening, singing to a crowd of benefactors

that grew to 220, much to the delight of the neighborhood folk, and then joined in feasting on the culinary delights supplied by Long Lake Market. John's daughter-in-law had invited High Octane a year ago, and the reborn A Cappella Fellas fulfilled that obligation.

About a dozen chapter members attended the **Windsor International Send-Off Show**, on June 14, at the Caboto Club in Windsor

## AROUND THE DISTRICT

On June 15, there was a memorial celebration for **Jim Stephens**, at Trinity Evangelical Church in Ann Arbor, MI.

**Marv Wilson** called me to answer my question about what quartets were chosen to sing in the lobby before *Meredith Wilson's The Music Man*, at Detroit's Fox Theater, in April. Turns out that three quartets showed up and were chosen: *Party of Four* – Tuesday night, Marv's *Today's Special* – Wednesday night, and, on Thursday night, the high school Jesuit quartet that some of us heard at Harmony Roundup last year. They all sang in the lobby on stairs and each quartet got eight free tickets in Row J of center section. In a reminiscent mood, Marv remarked that he had directed the Pontiac Waterford chapter during one Christmas season when Dick Johnson had heart surgery.

About 80 Barbershoppers and 76 high-school-age men gathered in Lansing for **Harmony Roundup** and **A Cappella Blast**. **WJBC** spent Friday Evening showing the youngsters their style.

## IN MEMORIAM

**Don Denoyer** died a month ago. A while back, I wrote Don, and he replied: "Hi John: Let's see, what can I say? This thing has got me good but hoping for the best. I start radiation on Monday and hopefully something good will come out of it. Please let the guys know that I miss seeing everyone and really miss blending some chords. Maybe something might come up to help me thru this crisis. Miss everyone and maybe time will come when I can get back into the fold again. My best regards to everyone. Keep up the cards and the phone calls; it means a lot to me. Regards, Don Denoyer"

The chorus sang at his **service**, May 21. **Bruce Brede** spoke, so I asked him to write down his **remembrances**. This is what he wrote:

## LEARNING AND GROWING WITH DON DENOYER

About six years ago, I attended my first rehearsal and was hooked. A couple weeks later I adopted Don as my barbershop role model... a lead, pleasant personality, non-judgmental, always knew his music and seemed accurate. I

watched, listened and grew for several years and even started a no-name quartet singing Lead. Then Don apparently gave up on me, switched to Tenor and joined another quartet. A year later (in early 2001) he became available and joined Harmony Way as it's Tenor. Then Don and I became really close as a Lead-Tenor combo.

Here's some funny and serious remembrances. Don always wanted us three to work as hard as he did...and that was a lot (Don, go to work up there and hark those herald angels). In late October at the 2001 Show, we had to make a quick change and get out in front of the curtain for our Harmony Way song...and to save time with those stupid band-and-hook bow ties, we agreed that the bass and bari would help each other and Don and I the same. I got Don's tie on him, turned to pickup my tie from a nearby chair, turned to Don for help...and no Don. By this time the Bass-Bari were ready to go and we could hear the applause. Where's Don? He'd gone on stage, took a bow to the applause and left me "hanging". Then he had the audacity to come off stage and yell, "you guys comin' out?" The bass-bari gave me a shove and I'm on-stage with my disheveled tie. We sang and laughed...and the audience thought it was all planned that way.

Then, sometime in early December, Don arrived late at rehearsal...he was never late and we were worried, calling Judy we found out he'd left home as usual with plenty of time. He finally arrived and said he'd accidentally driven to two other locations before my house, which he'd been to about 2 dozen times. Judy and I talked later wondering if his memory was failing even at the Fall Show. A couple weeks later they got the tragic diagnosis. I visited Don several times during the next 5 months, dueting at first, telling him jokes and soloing "Kitty Kitty" (hah) when he was hurting and then praying with him with eyes closed and little reaction. Harmony Way sang four-part harmony (arguable) with him in his recliner once early on (even with failing memory he knew his words as we stumbled.) Jack Teuber, Jim Owens and I sang two-part harmony with him (arguable) in his bed later on. That time his brother Bob showed up and talked and talked and talked (if you know Bob)...I thought I saw Don trying to get a word in, then give up and smile (he knew his younger brother Bob).

Finally, going back to late summer, 2001 when Don was healthy, he called me once with a Lead-Tenor rehearsal request. We agreed and sang a few of our quartet problem songs, then knowing all four of us were Christians, Don suggested finding a scripture verse that Harmony Way could call it's own. We searched and searched and then settled on Hebrews 10:24 (NIV), "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching." Did he see the day approaching even then? I love you, Don. We'll all miss you.

---

The **Barbershop Hall of Fame**, part of the Vocal Group Hall of Fame in Sharon, Pennsylvania, has re-opened. Admission is free! The BHOF is currently open only on the weekends, with plans to increase the hours in the future. The organization has had a complete restructuring, including the hiring of a new director. Sharon is located in the western part of Pennsylvania, about 15 minutes from Youngstown, Ohio. Visit their web site at [www.vghf.com](http://www.vghf.com). This year's induction ceremony is planned for the week of September 15-21. A list of the 2002 inductees is available on the web site. The 2002 champion quartet and chorus chosen in Portland will also be inducted.

**COTS.** Gregory P Humbel Marketing&Public Relations reports that the 2002 cots will be held in January 4-5 2003 at a new location, Holiday Express in Okemos, near East Lansing, to accommodate the increased growth, up to 200 attendees.

The **2002 International Convention** in Portland is JULY 3-6, 2002, and SPEBSQSA is in final preparation for the best **webcast** yet. Last year, an estimated 25,000 to 30,000 individuals listened on the web. This year, 36 hours of Internet broadcast will come live from the Rose Garden Arena in Portland, Oregon. **WHAT YOU'LL NEED:** You'll need the Windows Media Player (<http://www.windowsmedia.com/download>) to tune in to the webcast. There are players for Windows 95 and later, and for Macintosh System 8 and later. You'll be able to get all the information from the webcast page at the Portland web site, <http://www.spebsqsa.org/portland>

The draw for the **chorus singing order at the Portland convention** has been completed. Pioneer District's **Great Lakes Chorus** will be singing 17<sup>th</sup> out of 21.

Of course, we'll be rooting for **Power Play** in the quartet competition. Lead **Mike Slamka** recalls that his first quartet experience was in the summer of 1973 in White Lake, MI at a Grosse Pointe chapter picnic. "Quartet members were: Bass - Burt West, Bari - Gordy Dubrul, Lead - Sherm Faunts, and Tenor - Me (I was 2 1/2 yrs. old). The song was Coney Island Baby. After joining the society in 1981, it took a while for my cousin Don and I to get our fathers to sing in a real live registered quartet with us :-). We finally convinced them in 1985, and competed in our first district contest as, 'The Family Forum.'" The rest is history.

**Bulletin:** Tell me what you appreciate in this Bulletin and what else you'd like to see.

---

## **Calendar**

|                                  |   |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Jun 18                           | Chorus rehearsal, Crary Middle School     |
| Jun 25                           | No rehearsal; Flint picnic at Frankenmuth |
| Jun 30-Jul 7                     | International Convention, Portland, OR    |
| July 2                           | Chorus rehearsal, new location            |
| July 9                           | Chorus rehearsal, new location            |
| July 16                          | Chorus rehearsal, new location            |
| July 28-August 4                 | Harmony/Directors College, St. Joe, MO    |
| August                           | Picnic                                    |
| Sept 27-29                       | Bush League                               |
| Oct 18-20                        | District Convention – Battle Creek        |
| Sat, Nov 9 (2pm mat, 7:30pm eve) | Fall Show                                 |
| Jan 4-5                          | COTS, Okemos, MI                          |
| January 19-26, 2003              | Midwinter Convention, Albuquerque, NM     |
| Feb 22, 2003                     | Chorus Coaching Clinic, Lansing           |
| April 25-27                      | District Convention – Lansing             |

---

## **Chapter Executive Board**

### Officers

Chorus Director: Chris Miller  
President: Gene Downie  
VP, Chapter Development: Walt DeNio  
VP, Music and Performance: John Smith  
Secretary: Jeff Doig  
Treasurer: Dick Johnson  
Members at Large: Pete Mazzara and Wally Plosky

### Chairmen

Quartet Activity: Len Barnes  
Service (Charity): Bruce Brede  
Singing Valentine: Bob Marshall  
Chorus Manager: Jeff Spires  
Music Librarian: Roger Holm  
Uniform Manager: Bill Auquier  
Sunshine (Chaplain): Bill Dabbs  
Bulletin Editor: John Cowlshaw