We’ll Miss You, Lenny

On Thursday, June 21, 2018, 23 men from the Big Chief Chorus put on their class B uniforms and gathered at the Donelson, Johns and Evans Funeral Home to honor the memory of a veteran barbershopper. Len Barnes served the Pontiac-Waterford Chapter of the Barbershop Harmony Society for 63 years. The BCC was honored to comfort Lenny’s family and to sing “Precious Lord” and “It Is Well with my Soul” at his homegoing ceremony. Below is an article from the Nov. 2004 issue of Smoke Signals:

Len Barnes was born in 1926 in Schenectady, New York, where his dad was a radio announcer on WGY, the General Electric radio station. Later his dad worked at WLW in Cincinnati, announcing for such bands as Wayne King and Guy Lombardo. After a divorce, Lennie’s mom moved to Pontiac, where his step-dad worked at GM, and he and his older sister, Kathleen, grew up.

Lennie graduated from Pontiac Central High School in 1944. At age 17 he enlisted in the Air Corps, entered the cadet program, and finished basic training and some primary training by the end of the war. From then until his retirement in 1986, Lennie worked for General Motors Truck and Coach. In 1951 he transferred into GM Engineering where he met Bill Pascher and they began their famous lunch-hour singing in its lobby. In the 1960s, he became a Quality Control Supervisor, and then Coach Sales Distribution Manager, his position at retirement.

Lennie’s family had been musical on his mother’s side. His mom played the mandolin, and an aunt, the piano. His grandfather played cornet, and gave Lennie his solid brass instrument for Lennie to use (and keep polished) in school bands, under the direction of the phenomenal Dale Harris. Lennie met his future wife Yvonne when she was 6 years old, and began dating her when she was sixteen. They were married fifty-seven years ago, in 1947. Their daughter lives in Arizona, where Lennie has just bought a condo in Surprise, AZ, just west of Phoenix and Sun City, where Lennie and Yvonne plan to spend time in the winter, beginning this November 16th. Their grandson lives in Grand Rapids.

Lennie has always been athletic, an outdoor fellow. He swam endurance events in high school and also taught swimming at the Pontiac YMCA during the summers. He points out that swimming and horn-blowing strengthen breathing for singing. He has enjoyed fishing of all kinds. He ice-fished for years with his father-in-law. Much of his fishing is irrevocably mixed with singing. For six years, he would join Smitty for a couple weeks each winter to fish in the Florida Keys. For 35 years he fished in Canada – on the Mississagi River, and on several lakes including Lake Nipigon on a 54-foot houseboat for a week, and further north on the James Bay rivers. There has been a particular history of quartets fishing and singing together – fish a little, sing a little, fish a little – from James Bay to the Keys.

During 2002, Lennie had lymphoma, spending nine months in chemotherapy. His weight plummeted to 115, he lost his hair, and we thought we had lost him. In the last year, he has gotten a kick out of getting back to his instrumental roots, playing trumpet in the Fun Addicts Dixieland Band. This has also led him to join the New Horizons Band, which also meets at Crary. His formal barbershop experience began when he joined the Pontiac chapter in 1954. He has sung in many quartets, but the two notable ones were The Last Goodbye, and Sunnyside. The Last Goodbye included Bill Pascher, Paul Lehmkule, and Mel Parrish and lasted for nine years, during which time they were the most active quartet in the Society, averaging 60 singouts/gigs a year. They made $9,000, all of it going to charity except for the $0.10 a mile to cover the 8000 annual miles they drove, throughout southeastern Michigan. When The Last Goodbye ended with Lehmkule’s death, the group’s ages totaled 304 years. Lennie had met Smitty in the Pontiac chapter, and they formed Sunnyside with Roger Holm and Dick Johnson. Their 13-year life ended with Smitty’s death last year. He has held most of the chorus offices, including secretary, membership VP, chairman of the logopaedics charity, Lead section leader, and President three times. Lennie enjoys a variety of good instrumental and vocal music; for example, he enjoys Nelson Riddle’s band, and the singing of Linda Ronstadt and Roger Whittaker.
2018 Dead Creek Picnic

About 180 Barbershoppers, family, friends and fans from around SE Michigan enjoyed an evening of food, fellowship and harmony at the Dead Creek Picnic area in Frankenmeuth on Tuesday, June 19. The Flint Arrowhead Chorus organized the event and several area chapters participated, including the Big Chiefs from Pontiac-Waterford.

After the brats and saurkraut were happily devoured the choruses took the stage to perform their sets. The BCC sang their contest set “Let the Rest of the World Go By” and “There’ll Be No New Tunes on this Old Piano.”

Detroit Sound Machine was on hand to open the quartet singing, and after their set, BCC’s registered quartet, OverTime, joined with them to form a new octet. “TimeMachine” was thrilled to debut at the 2018 brat-fest and chose to sing “God Bless the USA” as their first public performance.

The highlight of the evening came as “Upper Deck,” sang their contest set which they will be presenting this month at the international competition in Orlando. The ballad, “Evermore,” from Disney’s “Beauty and the Beast” was especially arranged for them, and earned them a long standing ovation at the picnic.

Various pickup quartets also performed, including Dave McDonald’s “BigMac” which had it’s public debut singing “For All we Know.” And many quartets of various levels of experience came from many of the chapters attending the event. The BCC was by far the most well represented chorus among the quartets that performed.

A New Generation of Harmony

It’s good to see a group of young men taking an interest in barbershop music, and Maryann Lambrecht knows a thing or two (or a million) about young men singing in the barbershop style. On Tuesday, June 12, she brought her boys ensemble class from Milford High School to join the BCC rehearsal. It was a fun night and many of the BCC braves stepped up to offer encouragement and mentoring for her talented group of young singers.

Thanks to a generous donation of scholarships from the BCC, several of her students will be attending the “Harmony Explosion” youth camp this summer. And on June 7th, OverTime made time to attend class with the boys to help them gear up for their year end performances. Hopefully these efforts will help these young singers to launch long and fruitful careers in barbershop harmony.

July Birthdays

7th Bob Greenwood  29th Pete Mazzara

Membership Renewals

Hanson, J.  Jackson, T.  Legato B.  Mann, D.  McDonald, D.  Perry, C.  Schroder, Z.  Wallace B.
Sink or Swim? (or Float?)
By Brodie McDonald

I was recently working with my top choir about developing habits aimed at increasing technique and literacy, rather than “learning their songs.” You know, the “you can do better” speech.

A student came to me after class and said, “You know, Mr. McDonald, it just hit me. I thought I was working hard, but I realize now... I’ve been learning how to float instead of learning how to swim.”

I had not heard that metaphor before, so I asked him to elaborate. “I didn’t start choir until sophomore year, so I was so focused on learning how to survive that I failed to really focus on my technique. I’ve just been worried about not being wrong, so I’ve been working to blend in. Sure, I’m not sticking out negatively, but I feel like I’m not growing, either.”

We all have students who are learning to float rather than learning to swim. They are trying to “survive” by doing just enough to avoid negative attention. There is a big difference between not doing anything wrong, and doing something right. The absence of a negative is not a positive, but a starting point for positive behavior to begin.

We’ve all heard the phrase “sink or swim,” but that is a false binary. There’s something between the two that is neither failure nor progress, and that is FLOATING. With any choir activity or singing technique, imagine grading the performance by placing it into one of three columns: SINK, FLOAT, or SWIM.

SINK: poor, negligent, or disruptive behaviors
FLOAT: doing “OK” or getting by – nothing wrong, but not working towards developing skill or technique
SWIM: actively engaged, working towards development of consistent skill/technique (mistakes here are A-OK!)

Because the saying is “sink or swim,” is it possible that some students mistake floating for swimming? When they can understand SINK, FLOAT, or SWIM, they can be made aware of more levels of engagement, and thus understand that just because you are asking MORE of them, doesn’t mean they were “doing it wrong.” They could do it more actively and BETTER.

And remember: swimming can tire a person out. Everyone needs to float occasionally to catch their breath.

www.barbershop.org

BCC Calendar
Chorus Rehearsals are every Tuesday Evening from 7:30-10:00 PM at Waterford Baptist Cathedral, 2640 Airport Rd. Warmups begin at 7:25. Rehearsal afterglows follow at the Overtyme Grill and Taproom, 4724 Dixie Hwy.

Chorus Events
July 17, Tue. Grosse Point Picnic at Pier Park, Grosse Point Woods (Lake Shore Dr. at Moross) 6pm.
July 28, Sat. Oakland County Pioneer Historical Society Ice Cream Social, 12-2 pm, 405 Caesar Chavez Ave. Pontiac
Aug. 13, Mon. DOC picnic 5pm at Sylvan Lake Comm. Ctr.
Aug. 21, Tue. BCC Picnic 5pm at Sylvan Lake Comm. Ctr
Sept. 16, Sun. MIOCA (Ovarian Cancer Benefit), Rochester Hills Village, at 9:00 AM. Warm-up at 8:30 AM.
Nov. 3, Sat. 74th Annual Show at Mott PAC.
Nov. 6, Tue. BCC Christmas Chorus 7:30 PM
Nov. 27, Sat. Waterford Tree Lighting, 5200 Civic Ctr. Dr. at 6:00 PM.
Dec. 15, Sat. Christmas Bus Tour, bus leaves at 10:45 AM.

Chapter Leadership
Director: Thomas Blue (248-814-9627)
Assistant Directors: Mike Frye
President: Eric Domke (248-674-2323)
Past President: Jack Teuber (248-334-3686)
VP: Chapter Development: Jon Knapp (248-766-0999)
VP: Music Performance: Zach Schroeder (248-929-1285)
VP: Marketing & PR: Jack Teuber (248-334-3686)
Secretary: Charlie Perry (248-880-9356)
Treasurer: Jim Owens (248-682-4311)
At Large: A. Carinci, B. Greenwood, R.Sturdy, A. Suthers
Chorus Manager: Gene Downie (248-682-9321)
Captain Sunshine: Bill Maxfield (248-698-1393)
Chorus Librarian: Roger Holm (248-623-7452)
Section Leaders: McFadyen, Doig, Sturdy, Moss
Music: Zach, Blue, Frye, McFadyen, Doig, Moss, Mazzara
Bulletin Editor: Jon Knapp - jknappSLBC@att.net

OverTime will be performing at the Clarkston 4th of July Parade.
To arrange entertainment for your event please call Jeff (248) 640-1615.

4GVN is also available to sing at your event. Please call Greg at 248-338-2496 to make arrangements.