



The Central States District of the
Barbershop Harmony Society

The Serenade

Volume 71

Issue 1

January 23, 2025

SmorgasChorus hosts Harmony Explosion



Jared Williams

*South Central Kansas
Chapter - Wichita, Kan.*

300 students sign up to attend (some driving as far as two hours away just to attend the event)! Attending schools included Augusta High, Buhler High, Eureka High, Freedom Preparatory, Haysville Middle, Haysville West Middle, Northwest High, Prairie Hills Middle, Sterling High, Wichita Collegiate, and Wichita Heights.

The SmorgasChorus of the Central States District, located in Wichita, KS, held a Harmony Explosion event at Sterling College last week for Middle School and High School students from across the great state of Kansas.

Advertised as a barbershop workshop for students interested in music and singing, the SmorgasChorus received interest from private and public schools alike and had

Students arrived at Gleason Physical Education Center around 8:30, where they received a water bottle, a name tag, a pencil, and two pieces of sheet music. They were then shuffled into the large gymnasium there at Sterling College, where Mike Mays, associate director of SmorgasChorus, led the group in vocal warm-ups. Then Director Matt Webber took to introducing the students to the first song they would be singing - Happy Together. Singing in SATB, the students took to learning the new piece through Webbers guidance within a short time period. A little over an hour later, the students



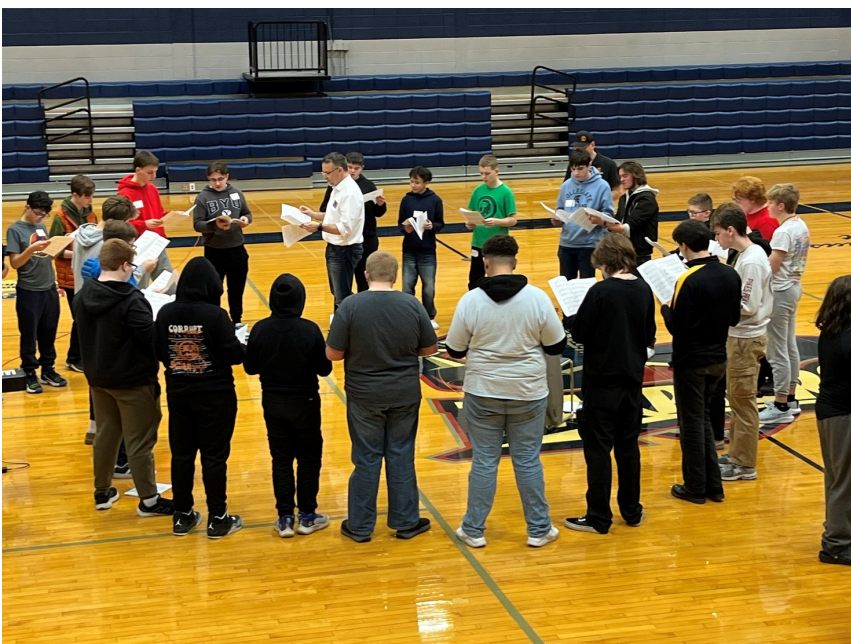


were found split into two separate groups. The treble clef singers went with Mike Mays to a separate gym next door to learn the SSAA song - Under the Boardwalk; while Assistant Director Jarl Moreland led the bass clef singers in a TTBB song - The Longest Time.

Just before lunch, the two groups joined together again to finish up learning Happy Together and to learn more about Barbershop. One by one, the dozen or so SmorgasChorus members who had come out to help put this workshop on stepped forward, introduced themselves, and expressed what singing Barbershop meant to them. The students heard many reasons to join Barbershop; from the joy of singing and the fun

atmosphere to the great community it brings; from personal growth and development to, well, the fact that you're never too old to sing!

The treble clef singers ate first, while the bass clef singers stayed behind to work on The Longest Time for a final run through. Lunch was graciously provided by the campus cafeteria for a very low rate, which made the event very affordable and much thanks goes out to Sterling College in their cooperation with SmorgasChorus to put on this event! Then it was the bass clef singers' turn to eat, while the treble clef singers went to work one last time on their piece, Under the Boardwalk.



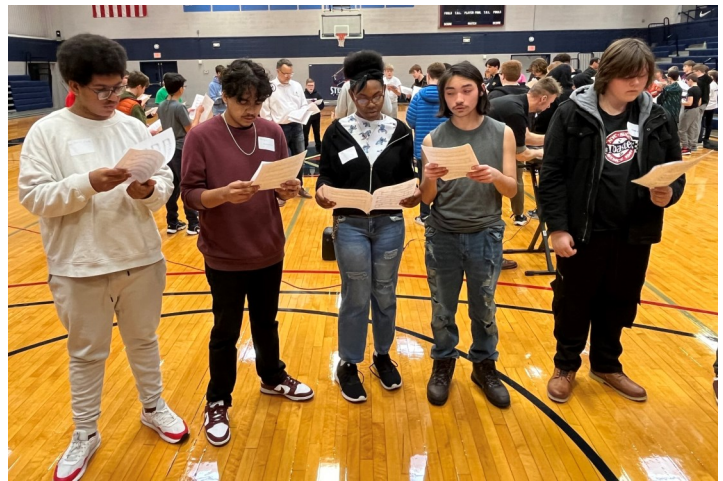
For the big finale, Sterling College opened to us their auditorium, and all 300 students sang and performed for the Sterling staff their three songs, with great applause. Throughout the event, signs of interest and joy could be found. From groups of students humming or singing their parts while walking from the gymnasium to the cafeteria, or the half-a-dozen students learning a tag from a SmorgasChorus member during break, to the smiles and snowballs thrown on the way to the auditorium, the atmosphere quickly became that of a Barbershop Harmony Society event - an atmosphere of family.

After the performance, the schools all left to go their own ways, but that will

not be the end of it. SmorgasChorus has been hosting similar events since 2013, and expects to continue the tradition for many years to come. Not only that, but there are plans to extend the tradition even further. In pursuit of SmorgasChorus' mission statement to enrich our community through music, support music education, and encourage and preserve the barbershop art form, they will be hosting a second event this year called the ICT Acapalooza. To be held in Wichita, KS, this time hosted by Wichita State University, SmorgasChorus plans to put on yet another Barbershop workshop for the Wichita area's Middle and High School students on April 18th. We hope your prayers join with ours in wishing this and all future endeavors meet with ever growing

success so that our family of Barbershop Society singers grows ever more.

Visit the SmorgasChorus Facebook page for more photos and videos from the event.



New CSD President excited for 2025



Brett Randolph

CSD President

As the newly elected president of the Central States District, it is with great joy and enthusiasm that I welcome you to 2025! Our district thrives because of the passion and dedication each of you brings to barbershop music, and I am thrilled to embark on this journey with you. I must thank Past District Presidents Matt Suellentrop and

Duane Lawson for their guidance and leadership over these past two years.

By the time this article is published, we will have held our annual Leadership Academy. This event was designed specifically for first-time chapter presidents, secretaries, and treasurers. This initiative aims to equip our new leaders with the tools and insights they need to guide their chapters effectively. Through a series of interactive workshops and mentorship opportunities, participants gained valuable skills in leadership, organization, and collaboration. That same weekend, the Board of Directors and Program Administrative Team met for our annual planning retreat. We used this time to dig deep into the results of the survey that was sent to all members last November to start planning events and activities that would make your barbershop experience more impactful. You will see some of those events and opportunities this year and more to come in 2026.

We have an exciting lineup of events planned for

the upcoming months that promise to enrich our skills, strengthen our leadership, and, most importantly, bring us together in harmony.

First on the calendar is HEP School dedicated to our talented quartets and choruses. This intensive weekend offers an array of coaching sessions led by some of the most esteemed professionals in the field. Whether you are fine-tuning your harmonies or exploring new vocal techniques, this weekend is all about elevating our musical performance and fostering a deeper connection within our ensembles. HEP School will be on Saturday, February 22nd at Shawnee Presbyterian Church in Shawnee, Kansas. Registration is available now on the CSD website.

Next, I am thrilled to announce that we are offering a lot of opportunities for competitors and non-competitors at the Spring Convention being held on April 10-13, 2025 in Kansas City, Missouri. This event will not only provide coaching opportunities for quartets and choruses but also introduce learning sessions tailored for chapter leaders. The convention will serve as a platform for musical growth, leadership development, and community building. It is an opportunity for all members to engage, learn, and celebrate our shared love for singing. This is an event that you will not want to miss. Registration and hotel information will be on the CSD website soon.

I wholeheartedly encourage each of you to participate in these events and take advantage of the opportunities they present. Together, we can make this year one of our most harmonious and successful yet!

Looking ahead to a busy year for CSD



Doug Brott

CSD Events Chairman

This year is shaping up to be full of exciting and fun events for all barbershoppers.

2025 HEP School

The 2025 HEP School has been scheduled for February 22, 2025 in Shawnee KS. Registration Information is on the CSD Website.

2025 Spring Convention

The 2025 Spring Convention and Contest will be held in

Kansas City, MO, April 10-13. The Headquarters Hotel and Venue is the Kansas City Airport Hilton. Here is some important dates and helpful information.

- Registration Deadline for Quartet and Chorus Contest Registration is March 11.
- Preferred Rate Hotel Reservation deadline is March 19.
- Early Bird Convention Registration deadline is March 11.
- Harmony Platoon Registration is open. Register link is on the CSD Website. Register soon so you have time to learn the songs.
- Chorus/Quartet Coaching will be available both Friday and Saturday. Sign up on the CSD Website.
- In addition, a variety of classes, roundtable discussions and other opportunities led by the Contest Judges and District Leaders will be available both Friday and Saturday.

We have contracted a special room rate with

the Kansas City Airport Hilton. As long as you make your registration before March 19, using the link on the CSD Website, the room rate will be \$139.00 per night plus taxes and reduced parking fee of \$5.00 per night. The rate includes complimentary access to the work out facilities and indoor/outdoor pool, along with complimentary Wi-Fi.

The Convention Team is always exploring ways to enhance the district conventions and other learning opportunities for our district members. This is growing into a HUGE, fun, different convention! The contests, while important, will be just a small portion of the weekend. Imagine if you will, a Harmony Platoon, HEP School, Leadership Academy, Top Gun, mini-Harmony University, coaching, and more, all rolled into one fun event!

New opportunities for the 2025 Spring Convention include:

- Harmony Platoon Thursday evening and Friday morning,
- Quartet and chorus coaching from the Contest Panel Judges,
- Various leadership and informational classes/discussions led by members of the Judging Panel and other District Leaders, and
- An EIH Mass Sing at a nearby shopping Center on Saturday afternoon.

Examples of some of the classes that will be available (based on sign-up) include:

- 60-90: Westminster Guide to Performance
- Getting the Most from Your Coaches
- Write Better Grants: How to Find Money and Tell Your Story
- Encouraging Youth in BBSshop Forum
- Musical Leaders Roundtable
- 5 Easy Steps for Vocally Expressive

Performances

- Building Community w/in the Ensemble
- Vocally & Visually Expressive Performances
- How & Why of Warmups
- Show Me Your Overtones!
- Holy Intonatus, How Can I Sing in Tune?
- Making Great Word Choices Through the Alexander Technique
- Singers Posture Myth Busters!
- Change Your Habits for the Better Using the Alexander Technique
- Happy New Ear!
- Chapter Leadership Classes for President, Secretary, Treasurer, and Chorus Manager

- Social Media Tips and Tricks

Reminder: The Spring Convention Contests are for Quartet International Prelims and Seniors Chorus Mid-Winter Prelims. Any quartet or chorus can enter for score and feedback. Plus, there will be plenty of opportunities for coaching.

Of course we will have a show and party on Saturday night. We are very fortunate to have three members of the International Quartet BrouHaHa on the Judging Panel and the 4th member will be attending. They will sing on the show and be leading classes and coaching throughout the weekend.

Opportunities Ahead!

Tips for making the most of your chapter development in 2025



Don Fuson

Membership

Chapter Development/ Membership VPs should be active for each and every chapter.

The short list of functions might include:

Guest Support – Welcome news guests, help get them their music, find them a riser buddy, exchange contact information to keep in contact.

New Members – Lead chapter and chorus orientation. Be sure to touch on the chapter's history, explain the chapter's culture, and outlook on the present and future.

Singing Skills – Ensure that new members are meeting with their musical leaders, and getting the basics of barbershop skills reviewed and enhanced.

Communications – Lead by example by engaging members in simple conversations about previous organizations, and singing experiences. Have conversations with the members (new, old, and even inactives) about their 2025 needs and expectations.

Development – Investigate what additional leadership and non-singing skills can be brought forward to help the chapter and the overall planning, operations, and results for goals in 2025.

Succession – Make a plan for the future by identifying one or two other members can you help develop and train to (one day) take over this role to benefit the chapters and members.

Bigger Picture – Develop the ability to not only support discussions and consensus for the chapter board, but also bring new ideas to the table and the members may be wanting to consider from their own community contacts.

Send me a note if you need to review any options that will help you help your own chapters!

Valentine Volunteers Needed

Volunteers needed for a program to provide free singing Valentines to those who defend us. This program uses reputable military-oriented charities to send out an offer to active duty military personnel and disabled veterans to send a Singing Valentine to their spouse, parent or sweetheart. In other words, we're repaying part of the debt we owe these defenders by helping them, in turn, give the gift of love to the loyal person who has supported them.

The offer starts out something like this:



**Active duty US service members:
Free Singing Valentine for your
Spouse, Mother or Sweetheart**



We've run this program successfully for two years and the results are as heart-warming as you can imagine: barbershoppers across the nation are more than happy to make this small recognition to these heroes, and we all know how every sweetheart melts and beams as they hear this love message.

Now it's time to ramp up the program. I am organizing volunteers to help me broadcast and deliver this gift to as many soldiers, sailors, marines and airmen as we can handle. In order of priority, I need help with the following:

1. Calling around to barbershop chapters to find quartets to deliver the Valentine
2. Forming quartets locally to handle requests in Missouri
3. Setting up the web systems to communicate among volunteers
4. Forward-looking outreach to plan for next year's expansion
5. Quartets to send Remote Singing Valentines via web or phone call when we can't get a live quartet.

If you're interested in helping out, let me know and I can give you complete details:

Dave Hentchel
davehentchel@gmail.com
(617) 803-1193

Member Spotlight



Anthony Fortino

Lead: Midtown

*2023 International
Quartet Champion*

A Life in Harmony: My Barbershop Journey

Barbershop harmony has been the soundtrack of my life for as long as I can remember. From my earliest days, I've been immersed in the world of close harmony, rich traditions, and unforgettable connections that make this art form so special. My journey in barbershop has shaped not just my passion for music and

performing, but the very person I've become.

It all started with my dad, Mark Fortino, who was introduced to barbershop in the mid-1980s as a high school student in Joplin, Missouri. His love for barbershop was undeniable, and it quickly became a family tradition. My introduction to barbershop was essentially at birth—I attended my first international convention when I was just six weeks old, in Calgary in 1993.

A Childhood Full of Harmony

As a kid, my house was always filled with music. My dad's quartet, 12th Street Rag, rehearsed at our house every week, and I'd sit on the balcony, peeking through the spindles, captivated by their harmonies. Their songs became the soundtrack to my childhood; I walked around the house singing their repertoire, barely understanding the words but loving every note.

For my fifth birthday, I didn't ask for toys or games—all I wanted was a pair of "quartet shoes," those shiny tuxedo shoes my dad and his quartet wore when they performed. Even at that young age, I wanted to emulate them. By the time I was six, I was forming my own "quartets" with my cousin Jonathan. We'd hold our own "international competitions," dressing up as different quartets, singing snippets of songs, and awarding imaginary medals. We of course scored 12th Street Rag 100 every time and thought they should have won every year.

When I was seven, my one wish for my eighth birthday was to join the Heart of America Barbershop Chorus (HOA). My parents, recognizing how much this meant to me, made it happen. I became the youngest member of the chorus, and at age 11, I made my international stage debut with HOA in Louisville, Kentucky—the same city that would play a monumental role in my journey years later.

Finding My Voice

At 13, I formed my first "real" quartet, Raising the Bar, with my cousins Jonathan Fortino (baritone) and Andrew Meier (lead), and Steven Duncan (tenor) – son and brother of SAI Queens of Harmony Michelle Hunget and Mary Duncan. Singing bass, we competed at Harmony Explosion youth contests at Olathe East High School and won two years in a row. Later, our lineup shifted, with my cousin Daniel on Tenor, Steven on Lead, Jonathan on Bari, me on bass, and we competed at the Central States District (CSD) contest, earning the Super Novice Quartet



Award and a 12th place finish.

As I entered high school, I discovered a new passion: musical theatre. I threw myself into school musicals and productions around the Kansas City area, but barbershop remained a constant. I continued to sing with HOA and competed with quartets like Back in Business and Resonation. I also competed one year with my dad and cousins Daniel and Jonathan – the 4tno’s – earning a 3rd place finish at the district contest. These experiences deepened my love for music and taught me the discipline needed to perform at a high level.

Contest in '13, '14, and '15, but due to my busy musical theatre schedule were only able to compete in '14 in Vegas, where we placed 26th. Balancing barbershop with a demanding musical theatre schedule wasn't easy, but the friendships and joy of singing kept me going.

The Big Apple and Midtown

After graduating in 2016 with degrees in accounting and theatre, I moved to New York City to pursue my two careers. I thought my barbershop career might pause again, but once barbershop is in your heart, it's hard to stay away. One of the first places I visited in June 2016 after moving to NYC was a rehearsal of the Voices of Gotham, the barbershop chorus in the area and perennial top 10 chorus in the world. I auditioned for the chorus and officially became a member in August 2016, but my time with the chorus was short-lived. In September 2016 I was cast in the Broadway National Tour of 2015 Tony Award winning musical - "Fun Home." I left the city for the next year and a half to tour the country and this was by far the longest hiatus I'd ever taken from barbershop in my life to that point

I returned to NYC at the beginning of 2018 and returned to a Voices of Gotham rehearsal. Soon after that rehearsal I received a message from Nick Gordon asking if I'd be interested in singing in a quartet with him, KJ from Lunch Break and his buddy Christian Diaz who had a few silver medals from the college contest. I said yes and we had our first rehearsal in March 2018. This was my first time singing Lead in a quartet, but I was up for the challenge!

The rest is history with Midtown - Mid-Atlantic



A Texan Twist

When I left Kansas City for Texas Christian University (TCU) to double major in accounting and theatre, I thought barbershop might take a backseat. But the harmony called me back. In my freshman year, I connected with members of the Vocal Majority and quickly found myself

singing tenor in a collegiate quartet, Bonus Track.

We placed 5th at the 2012 International Collegiate Quartet Contest in Portland, OR and won the Southwestern District Quartet Championship later that year. We went on to qualify for the International



District Champions, 5th place in Salt Lake City, 2nd place in Charlotte, and finally 1st place, gold medalists in....Louisville, KY. The same city where I made my first appearance on the international stage, 19 years earlier.

Full Circle Moments

Barbershop has always been about family for me. One of the most meaningful moments of my journey came this past year in 2024, when I competed with my dad and brother in the quartet Fortino & Co. We won the CSD Quartet Championship, and sharing that victory with my family was an experience I'll treasure forever.

Barbershop: The First Love

People often assume I came to barbershop after a career in musical theatre, but the truth is,

barbershop came first. My mom has papers from kindergarten where I wrote that my dream was to become "a gold medalist quartet singer." That dream stayed with me through every phase of life, guiding me back to harmony no matter where I was or what I was doing.

Now, having achieved that dream, I look back with gratitude for the incredible journey. To my dad, my family, my quartet mates, HOA, and the entire CSD community—you've all been a part of this beautiful story.

What's next for me in barbershop? I don't know yet, but if the past is any indication, harmony will always find its way into my life. Barbershop isn't just music; it's a family, a tradition, and a lifelong love.

Spring Contest/Convention Preview



Carter Combs

Contests and Judging

Chorus International Prelims. BUT, that ain't all...

This is growing into a HUGE, fun, different convention! The contests, while important, will be just a small portion of the weekend. Imagine if you will, a Harmony Platoon, HEP School, Leadership Academy, Top Gun, mini-Harmony University, coaching, and more, all rolled into one fun event!

Last year, your CSD leadership decided to move all our District-level contests to our Fall Conventions. So, what does that leave for the Spring? Glad you asked!

CSD Spring Convention will be held at the Hilton Kansas City Airport, on April 11-12, hosted by the Heart of America Chorus. We will hold both our Quartet and Seniors

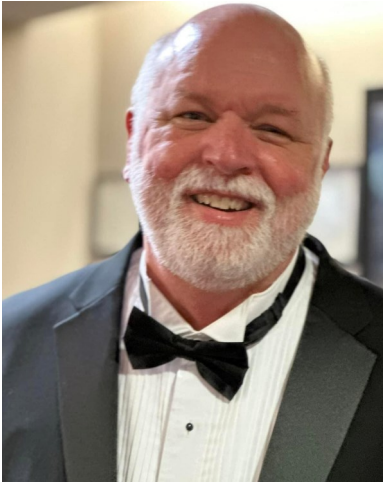
This new format is intended to give every barbershopper, competitor or otherwise, a fun, fulfilling weekend!

- If you are in a quartet or chorus, you can sign up for extended coaching.
- If you are not in a quartet but would like to sing in one, the Harmony Platoon may be just the thing for you.
- If you are one of your chapter's leadership, or wannabe, we'll have classes that will expand your mind.
- If you prefer to tag & socialize, we've just the place for you.

In other words, this is a Spring Convention like you've never seen before. Our Saturday show headliner quartet will be... oops... not allowed to say yet...

Let's just say, this is a Convention you won't want to miss. So, plan to be in Kansas City April 11-12 for a barbershop event that will energize and invigorate you, sending you to, dare I say, 7th heaven!

Blast From the Past: Noise Boys



Jeff Veteto

*Bass, 2001 CSD Quartet
Champion,
Noise Boys*

As we all rolled into the new millenium, changes were happening at the district level. One of the flagship quartets of CSD, Freefall, was wrapping things up, as a couple of their members, Jim Clark and Darin Drown, headed to Colorado ... ultimately leading to Storm Front, which is a whole other story. This left Bemo Myers and Scott Spilker as "free agents."

Likewise, in SWD, another flagship quartet, Tulsa Tradition, was also wrapping things up. During the final four years (1998-2001) of their amazing run, Jeff Veteto had joined as bass, singing alongside veterans Tim Ambrose, Curt Angel, and Don Conner.

Meanwhile, in addition to singing with Tulsa Tradition, Jeff had spent a couple of years singing bari in the fall CSD contests with Finale, along with lead Brian Plunkett, bass Darrell Link, and a couple of fine tenors, John Stockstill and Ned Horner.

So as thoughts turned to the fall contest of 2001, a perfectly natural combination formed up: Bemo Myers on tenor (he had sung lead and bari previously); Curt Angel on lead; Brian Plunkett on baritone (he had sung lead previously); and Jeff Veteto on bass. Perfectly natural, especially since we were all in close proximity: Curt in Tulsa, Oklahoma; Jeff and Brian in Springfield, Missouri; and Bemo in St. Joseph,

Missouri. What could be more natural?

And the name? Well, frankly, we stole that from a retired quartet from SWD that never (quite) won. We can only hope that we carried on the tradition of the "Noise Boys" name in a fitting way.

So we got busy, and did what we could. A particularly fortuitous moment was when we were able to piggyback a great coaching session with Jay Giallombardo, memorably working all four contest numbers in "slo-mo," working every imaginable detail. Thus armed, we



headed into the 2001 CSD fall contest in Topeka, Kansas.

Let's just say it was fun. We were decently prepared, and the audience was very gracious to accept us. We held out some hopes that we could sneak out a win, but the final result blew us away: The Noise Boys won, with a bigger margin between 1st and 2nd than there was between 2nd and 10th.

Here's a bit of trivia for you: When the Noise Boys won, it was Brian's first district championship; Jeff's second; Bemo's third; and Curt's fourth.

(Even more trivial: Twelve years later, when Premium Blend won, it was Austin's first district championship; Adam's second; Jeff's third; and Mark's fourth. But I digress.)

The Noise Boys went on to qualify for International a total of five times, actually competing in 2003 (Montreal, 23rd place), 2007 (Denver, 23rd place), and 2011 (Kansas City, 36th place).

Along the way, there were some personnel changes:

- In 2005, Adam Veteto stepped in on bass (admirably), while Jeff (laughably) filled in on lead in Curt's absence
- In 2006, the formation reverted to its original foursome
- Also in 2006, Brian stepped away from baritone, and by 2007 Don Conner took on the baritone job

Also along the way, the Noise Boys sang on numerous shows, making many, many friends along the way. The last performance as an active quartet was in 2012 in Tulsa.

In the fall of 2023, the Noise Boys had the pleasure of singing a reunion

performance at the past champs show in Lawrence, Kansas. It was so much fun, we may just do it again in a few more years!



Barbershop is Family

The Chordial Celebration Story



Jim Clark

On behalf of the Chordial Celebration family, friends, and loved ones

In 1975, shortly before the first annual show of the new Scottsbluff, Nebraska barbershop chorus took place, 37-year-old Dr. Dan Clark joined the ensemble. Dan Clark, a lifelong music lover, singer, pianist, guitarist, and coronet player hadn't done anything in the way of music since he entered medical school in 1966. Now settled into a practice, raising a young family with his wife, Jamalee, Dan was looking for a place to scratch the musical itch. He tried

church choir. He performed in a few community theater productions. But they didn't satisfy his need to sing. At the urging of a couple of community members, he gave the new 'Sugar Valley Singers' chorus a try.

Clark, a one-time high school chemistry, biology, and choir teacher, was immediately tapped to be one of the two Assistant Directors of the chorus. Along with Gary Drown, the two assisted front-line director, Jerry Tallmon. After a year of work, Clark was still searching. The chorus was fun, the guys were lovely, they sang some good old songs, but the slow learning progress and the below-average singing were taking a toll on this guy who could play anything by ear on the piano. Shortly before the second-annual show, Clark privately resolved to step down from the chorus in the ensuing weeks.

Standing backstage during what he knew would be his last performance with the Sugar Valley

Singers, Clark watched the guest quartet take the stage. Clark had heard of 'barbershop' growing up – his own father was a fan – and he was well aware of the Buffalo Bills, courtesy of "The Music Man," but outside of that, his only experience was with the local chorus. The guest quartet opened their mouths and let fly their opening chords. Dan Clark stopped. His ears perked. He listened a little more attentively. After the quartet sang several more phrases, he said to himself, "So... It could be like that." He was listening to the Classic Collection, 6 years before they would win the International Barbershop Quartet contest of 1982.

Dr. Dan Clark did not quit the chorus.

In the ensuing weeks after that chorus show, Gary Drown and Dan Clark (who had been singing in an informal chapter quartet) discussed

THE CHORDIAL CELEBRATION

CONTACT: 837 RUSHINGA RD. 948 AVE. SCOTTSBLUFF, NEB. 69361 (308) 639-0253

BARBERSHOP COMEDY (AND SINGING)

WHAT IS A CHORDIAL CELEBRATION?
(With apologies to D. Webster)

A Chordial Celebration is four parts harmony blended with a bit of ticklematter, analyzed closely:

Lead: *Ours is fearless, handsome, has dimples the size of bomb craters. Does not understand: pimples, sweat, or athlete's foot.*

Bass: *Stands 6'5", weighs 265 and is blessed with profuse back-hair.*

Baritone: *In real life plays left defensive knob for a professional Fools-Ball team, and is particularly deaf in his good ear.*

Tenor: *While many tenors can scale high C, ours can best scale a carp.*



forming an 'official' quartet. They bandied member names about, wondering who might be the best fit. Drown and Clark, now in their 30s, landed on two guys in their mid-20s, a young teacher and a young farmer. The teacher, Rod Businga, had perfect pitch, a remarkably high, ringing natural voice, and could hear all the idiosyncrasies of the baritone part. Steve Libsack, a young farmer, had plenty of singing background in his family, and was rolling out a nice, clean bass sound for such a young guy. With Gary's charismatic radio voice and never-met-a-stranger personality on the Lead part, and Clark's clear, in-tune voice on Tenor, they thought they'd 'give it a whirl.' Most importantly, they enjoyed each other's company.

The 'Chordial Celebration' was born.

The first few years of the quartet's life were spent trying to figure out who they were. They found songs they enjoyed and practiced most Tuesday nights, following Sugar Valley Singers rehearsal. Developing a growing repertoire of song, they immediately began singing on every Sugar Valley Singers show, quickly establishing themselves as the premier chapter quartet. By the end of the

1970s, through Gary Drown's contacts all over the Nebraska panhandle, they got themselves hired to headline a show or two. Their very first show was at the Wildcat Hills Amphitheater south of Gering, NE the summer of 1977. The most memorable at the time was a show in Chappel, Nebraska the summer of 1979. Shauna Libsack was expecting their second child and was worried the little one might decide to make an appearance while her husband was a hundred miles away. Her doctor assured her she shouldn't worry as the baby wasn't anywhere near ready to be born. The quartet made the trek to Chappel, sang the show, went to the afterglow, and decided to drive home late that night. As they arrived at the Libsack farm, they found Shauna waiting for them in the living room, taking short, measured, contraction-prompted labor breaths. Steve dropped his suitcase, and they drove off to the hospital where Syd was born.

Shauna's doctor, who assured her she didn't need to worry about 'early' labor? Dr. Dan Clark.

1980 brought about two dramatic shifts for the Chordial Celebration. The first was the quartet family's inaugural long-haul show weekend. The quartet Moms (Penny Businga, Shauna Libsack, Judy Drown, and Jamalee Clark) decided it would, in fact, be fun for the moms and kids to tag along on a quartet weekend. Off they trekked, the 300 miles to Kearney, NE, kids swapping out to ride in each other's vehicles, spending as much time as possible in the Holidome pool, and discovering they all enjoyed spending time with each other. The second shift came courtesy of the OK Four.

The OK Four, an Internationally competitive



quartet from Oklahoma City, were the headliners of the Sugar Valley Singers show in 1980. Rather than stand backstage to watch the guest quartet, the Chordial Celebration guys chose to sit out front with their families so they could see just how entertaining this celebrated comedy quartet was. The OK Four obliterated expectations. The audience laughed for 30+ straight minutes. Dan Clark would recall looking at his own mother-in-law near the end of the OK Four's set and seeing her face streaked with her mascara, tears streaming down her face, red-faced and unable to speak from laughing so hard. When the Chordial Celebration next got together, they agreed that they, too, should become a comedy quartet. The decision would keep them performing for the next 30 years.

The Chordial Celebration would grow their main stage show to a full-blown 40+ minutes of laughs, and an afterglow set of another 20-30 minutes of hilarity. Many's the time a renowned headliner quartet was humbled having to follow the Chordial Celebration on stage immediately after they had dismantled the audience. District Champions, International Qualifiers, International Semi-Finalists, International Finalists, International Medalists, even International Champs, it mattered not. The high-powered headliner quartet, not realizing the audience had just been wonderfully, completely emotionally exhausted through Chordial Celebration's 40+ minutes of laughter, would take the stage, crush their opening song, then step back in shock at the tepid, polite applause coming from the audience. A sobering experience for any headliner.

Meanwhile, the Chordial Celebration families continued to find endless fun in their socializing. Multiple times a year, a quartet cookout would happen at someone's house. There would be the grilling of the protein (the dads laughing around the grill), the prepping of the other dishes in the kitchen (the moms laughing over the veggies), and the table being set (sometimes by the kids). After the feast, the dads would retire to quartet rehearsal, the kids would play games outdoors, and the moms would catch up on all the goings-on in each other's lives. Depending on the year, two or three or all four of the families would attend the International Barbershop convention together – '83, '85, '86, '88, '89 – and on and on.

Darin Drown was the oldest of the Chordial Celebration sons. He had joined the Sugar Valley Singers around age 10, and had already sung in a few chapter quartets by the time he went to college in 1987. A born educator, he would become a Trumpet major, join the local Lincoln Continentals chorus in Lincoln, NE, and teach tags to his fellow music students whenever he could.

Jim Clark was 5 years younger than Darin, started periodically singing with the Sugar Valley Singers at age 7, and would join the chorus at age 12. Jim would later also join the Lincoln Continentals when he, himself, went to college.

Syd Libsack was 5 years younger than Jim, and while he was interested in singing, he didn't really join the Sugar Valley Singers, per se. He did form a high school quartet with his childhood best friend, Soren Wohlers. Syd's first real chorus experience would come with he joined the Great Northern Union chorus after the Libsacks moved to Minneapolis in the 1990s.

For 14 years, the Chordial Celebration had been singing all over the 9-state Rocky Mountain District, with the occasional foray into other districts. By the time life moved the Drowns away in 1989, the quartet had already sung every RMD Chapter show at least once, many of them twice. They competed at the District conventions infrequently; they were not in it for medals. But every time they did compete, they qualified for the final round, and received another round of show requests in the aftermath. With the departure of the Libsacks to Minnesota in the '90s, the Chordial Celebration went on unofficial hiatus, a hiatus that would be relatively short-lived.

When the inaugural College Quartet Contest was announced in 1992, Darin Drown immediately formed a quartet at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Their quartet, the Four Hoarsemen, qualified to compete at the contest in New Orleans in July, 1992. The Chordial Celebration families – the dads, most likely – hatched the idea that everyone should trek from the Nebraska panhandle to New Orleans in the Libsack motor home. 1500+ miles one-way. It was a long, arduous, hilarious trip, with The Four Hoarsemen placing 2nd in the College Quartet Contest.

By fall of 1993, Darin Drown had asked Jim Clark to sing in a new CSD quartet, Freefall. They would place 4th in CSD

as Novice Quartet Champs in October, starting a 5-year journey that would see them qualify for the International contest 4 times, placing as high as 21st, and win the CSD Championship in 1995. Following in the Chordial Celebration's rule of thumb that entertainment is the number one priority for an audience, Freefall would blend good singing, comedy, drama, emotion, and even brass to their repertoire. As Freefall's show schedule filled up during the '90s, an opportunity arose for the Chordial Celebration to return to active performing. Between 1994 and 1998, the Chordial Celebration and Freefall appeared jointly on numerous shows, bringing the Chordial Celebration's entertainment back to the Central and Rocky Mountain District chapter show stages.

Darin Drown's acceptance of a teaching job in Aurora, Colorado brought Freefall's career to a close. However, another brief opportunity opened. Darin, Gary, Dan, and Jim formed an official quartet – the New & Used CDs – to compete in the RMD Fall contest of 1998. With permission from Rod Businga and Steve Libsack, the New & Used CDs performed Chordial Celebration material for the contest, placing 2nd, and earning multiple show requests over the following two years.

In late 1998, another Chordial Celebration legacy quartet formed as Syd Libsack assembled a college quartet with his old friend Soren Wohlers. Millennium began rehearsing at Northwest Missouri State, utilizing Jim Clark (attending NWMSU grad school) as a coach. In January of 1999, Syd informed Jim that Millennium's tenor would not be able to compete that year. However, Syd had already gotten the thumbs-up from BHS that Jim was still young enough to compete with



Millennium if he wanted to. Jim accepted. Millennium would go on to win 3rd place at the International College contest in Anaheim in July of 1999. Shortly thereafter, Jim graduated and moved to Aurora, CO as well. The following year, Millennium would win the International College Quartet contest in Kansas City.

By May of 2001, Syd Libsack had also moved to the Denver area, and three of the Chordial Celebration's sons found themselves in the unique position of forming their own quartet. Storm Front was born and shortly began performing 20 show weekends per year. Yet again, the Chordial Celebration was receiving gig requests, oftentimes to appear jointly with Storm Front, closing out each show with an octet version of 'The Gospel Medley.' For the better part of the next decade, multiple times per year, the Chordial Celebration would send audiences into paroxysms of laughter, and the rising International competitors, Storm Front, would follow, knowing full well they had little hope of recovering the crowd after the dads did their thing.

At the International competition of 2010, Storm Front's 2nd song was a new Darin Drown arrangement of 'What a Wonderful World.' The intro, a Darin Drown/Storm Front original, paid tribute to all the quartet dads – "Barbershop is family, with friendship, love, and harmony. We still recall our dads' quartet, when first we heard that ring. Our fathers told us long ago, 'Just make 'em laugh! You'll steal the show.' And so tonight we honor them with one they used to sing." By Saturday night, July 3, 2010, Storm Front would be the new International Barbershop Quartet Champs. In the aftermath of their win, Storm





Front's schedule did not slow down. One of the most anticipated shows was the upcoming October 23-24th Kearney, Nebraska shows, where Storm Front would once more share the stage with the Chordial Celebration. A Saturday matinee in Arapahoe, NE, a Saturday evening show in Kearney, and a Sunday matinee in North Platte, NE. The Saturday 'everglow' was hosted at the Drown house, and the two quartets sang multiple songs together as friends and family enjoyed music, laughter, and pizza.

It was the final performance for the Chordial Celebration.

A few weeks later, Gary Drown was diagnosed with the cancers that would take him from us by February of 2011.

For the better part of 35 years, the Chordial Celebration entertained countless thousands across the west-central US. They performed every RMD Chapter show at least once, more than half of them twice, and many of them three times over those decades. They competed in the Buckeye Invitational Comedy Quartet Contest in 2000, the International Seniors Quartet Contest in 2008, and numerous district competitions through the years. They never qualified for the 'big

dance' at International. They never even won a District Championship. And they didn't care. They weren't in it for the hardware. They were in it to transform every show audience through the overwhelming joy of laughter. When in the midst of the chaotic fun of doing shows, it is easy to miss what an impact a person has as a performer. As an example, when they would sing their classic "Filbert the Frog" song with a volunteer child audience member on stage with them, they had no idea what that meant to those kids. But in the later years, when they would perform on shows, and adult audience members would approach them and say, "I was the 'Frog Song' kid back in the early 1980s!," they began to realize they had made a difference. And when, on more than one occasion, that same person was the parent of the later day child volunteer, it became clearer. These four guys regular guys – a farmer, a teacher, a radio broadcaster, and a family doctor – had transcended all the boundaries and given a lifelong gift of joy and hope and laughter to thousands upon thousands of people. And those people had been permanently changed for the better by that gift.

What could be better than that?

CSD Board of Directors

Program Administrative Team

District President

Brett Randolph
Email: president@singcsd.com
Phone: (316) 371-1269

Executive Vice President

Dan Bodtke
Email: evp@singcsd.com
Phone: evp@singcsd.com

Immediate Past President

Matt Suellentrop
Email: ipp@singcsd.com
Phone: (636) 279-5818

Secretary

Mark Fuerniss
Email: secretary@singcsd.com
Phone: (402) 310-8846

Treasurer

Jeff Arians
Email: treasurer@singcsd.com
Phone: (641) 529-2328

Missouri/Arkansas VP

Stephen True
Email: missouri-arkansasvp@singcsd.com
Phone: (816) 560-5725

Kansas VP

Mike Shepherd
Email: kansasvp@singcsd.com
Phone: (785) 410-3094

Nebraska VP

Rick Pape
Email: nebraskavp@singcsd.com
Phone: (402) 304-2559

Iowa VP

Larry Hlavacek
Email: iowavp@singcsd.com
Phone: (319) 981-0724

South Dakota VP

Cliff Huot
Email: southdakotavp@singcsd.com
Phone: (605) 201-9398

Membership

Don Fuson
Email: membership@singcsd.com
Phone: (913) 226-8993

Marketing & Public Relations

Todd Johnson
Email: marketing@singcsd.com
Phone: (314) 800-8512

Music & Performance

Duane Lawson
Email: music-performance@singcsd.com
Phone: (816) 419-2644

Chorus Director Development

Larry Monson
Email: cdd@singcsd.com
Phone: (563) 379-9646

Events

Doug Brott
Email: events@singcsd.com
Phone: (913) 660-3817

Contest & Judging

Carter Combs
Email: drcj@singcsd.com
Phone: (816) 914-2998

Chapter Support & Leadership Training

Chad Schuetz
Email: cs1t@singcsd.com
Phone: (316) 573-2319

Historian

James Gwaltney
Email: historian@singcsd.com
Phone: (402) 250-3709

Webmaster

Tim Suellentrop
Email: webmaster@singcsd.com