

A History to Celebrate the Harmonizers' 75th Year



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THE BEGINNING

The Alexandria Chapter of the Society for the Preservation and Encouragement of Barber Shop Quartet Singing in America, Incorporated (SPEBSQSA Inc., hereafter referred to as the Society) was chartered on June 16, 1948 (historians will note that the actual charter was signed on June 19.). We are now part of the Barbershop Harmony Society (BHS), the new business name of the Society, headquartered in Nashville, TN, and a part of its Southern Division of the Mid-Atlantic District (M-AD). We were called the Alexandria Harmonizers in a 1948 *Alexandria Gazette* article to describe “the new group in town” that was having a concert, and we have used the moniker ever since. Soon after we were founded, the marketing gurus coined the phrase “George Washington Sang Here,” (a play on the popular gag in the Alexandria/Mt. Vernon area “George Washington Slept Here!”) and placed it on our name tags and chapter signs.

The chapter was conceived by **Dean Snyder**, an enthusiastic barbershopper and member of the Washington, DC, chapter who was active in spreading the word and helping men discover this singing hobby. In the winter of 1947, he and his wife rescued **Gene Barnwell** and his wife from a bus stop in a bad rain storm. Dean quickly led the discussion to singing and the rest is history.

Gene was into music and helped Dean rally enough singers to charter a new chapter in Alexandria, sponsored by the Washington, DC, barbershop chapter. Dean was also quick to suggest to Gene that as director of the Alexandria Recreation Department, he should consider adding barbershop harmony singing to the department. This is how our chapter came to be supported by the City of Alexandria, through Parks and Recreation.

True to its name to preserve quartet singing, the chapter quickly formed quartets in those early years. One, THE VIRGINIA HAMS, was composed of several men who had been founders of the chapter or who had joined right after the founding: **Al Siepert, Bill Bennett, Henry Brown,** and **Wilbur Schmidt**. They combined humor and good singing to entertain a lot of audiences.

MEETING LOCATIONS AND WEEKLY AFTERGLOWS

The city also arranged for the chapter to meet at the recreation center at 1605 Cameron Street. They met there until after the chapter's 50th anniversary.

While the Cameron Street space was unavailable during the 1970s, the chorus met at an older city building on King Street called the Chinquapin Recreation Center. The men of the chapter helped refurb and paint the building. At some point the chorus was invited back to Cameron Street to the newly named Durant Rec Center. Also over the years, the chorus met at schools and many different churches throughout the City for the regular Tuesday night rehearsals and for special extra rehearsals and social events. Durant was renovated a second time in 2003, which meant the chapter met at Plymouth Haven Baptist Church on Ft. Hunt Road.

In 2019, the chapter needed to find a new permanent meeting place and relocated to the Scottish Rite Temple (SRT) at 1430 Braddock Road in Alexandria, VA.

An afterglow after the chapter meetings was held in many places over the years, but a few spots were successful and lasted a while. Geno's on King Street was for many years the go-to spot. Tags rang into the night and many men say that is where they learned to sing barbershop. Another spot was Southside 815 on South Washington. In 2021, **Joe Cerutti** and **Terry**

Reynolds purchased the home where **Lew Klinge** lived before his move back to Iowa. It soon became the Harmo House and is used for afterglows, committee meetings and social events.

MEMBERSHIP GROWTH

The chapter started with eighteen members – the minimum number required to receive a Society charter document signed by Society founder **OC Cash**. The chapter grew fast and stayed at about 60 members for many years until chapter leaders, led by **John Adams** in the 1960s, made a concerted effort to grow to 100. Eventually, the chapter became the largest in the Society with over 200 members. Many men joined and when they were transferred for military or work reasons, they retained their membership in Alexandria, which is still true today. The COVID pandemic of 2019-2021 caused the numbers to decline to under 175. We have had over 1,300 members join our chapter since its founding.

ADMINISTRATIVE LEADERSHIP

From the earliest years, chapter members shared their leadership skills at the chapter, M-AD and Society level. Many men have contributed as officers, board members, and committee chairs in musical and administrative leadership. Eight of our members have served as M-AD president including **Hal Schultz**, 1958-60; **Buck Dominy**, 1962-63; **Wilbur Sparks**, 1966-67; **Alan Wile**, 2005-06; **Gary Plaag**, 2009-10; **Bill Colosimo**, 2013-14; **Dennis Ritchey**, 2017-18, and **Bob Eckman**, 2019-2020.

Several members assumed leadership roles at the Society level. **Wilbur Sparks** was Society president in 1970. **Darryl Flinn**, a Harmonizer coach and chapter member who coined the phrase “breathless moments,” was Society president in 1987 and served a term as executive director. **Dean Snyder** never served as president, but he was on the Society board and was its historian for years. He was often called upon to speak or share his knowledge of the Society as an elder statesman. (We had him on stage with us when he was 94 and he introduced a song as part of our swan song package at the 1996 International in Salt Lake City.) **Bud Arberg**, a composer and one of our early music directors, was the first to use the phrase “barbershop craft” to describe teaching techniques and methods at the Society level. Bud worked for the Department of the Army and was assigned to develop materials used around the world to help men sing better. He also adapted the “Caisson” song into the official Army song in 1957. **Alan Lamson** who sang with us was also a Society president in 2011 and 2012. **John Santora** became Society president in 2023.

Major changes have come into play in the way the chapter administration is managed. The chapter sought and obtained permission in 2014 to add community board members to the chapter board. We became the first BHS chapter to have community board members who were not members of the chapter, including the first female chapter board member in BHS history, **Liz Birnbaum**. A separate 501(c)3 companion organization to the BHS Chapter, called Alexandria Harmonizers, Inc., was formed in 2015. Its purpose is to simplify applying for grants and obtaining tax-deductible donations for the chorus. Both organizations have their own boards.

The day-to-day operations of the chapter were removed from the boards and assigned to an Ops Team made up of volunteers within and outside the chorus and headed by an executive

director. **Terry Reynolds** was the first executive director and **Randall Eliason** has filled that position until now.

A strategic plan was developed in 2017-18 with the help of community board member **Marie Muscella**. As part of that process, the chorus adopted a Mission Statement: *Enriching lives through vocal harmony in the greater DC area.*

In 2022, in order to streamline operations, it was decided that the membership of the two boards would be identical (although the boards remain legally distinct) and that they would hold joint board meetings. An ops team still manages day-to-day details of chorus operations and chapter secretary was added to that team. The chapter also hired its first paid, part-time general manager, **Susan Fitzpatrick**, in 2022.

MUSICAL LEADERSHIP

While the chapter grew in numbers and administratively, it also was growing strong musically. We have been so fortunate to have gifted chorus directors: **Gene Barnwell** – 1948-50; **Werner Paul** – 1950-51; **Bud Arberg** – 1951-62; **Oz Newgard** – 1963-70; **Scott Werner** – 1970-80 and 1984-2002; **John Hohl** – 1980-83; **Terry Reynolds** – interim Aug.-Dec. 2002; **Richard Lewellen** – 2003-06; and **Joe Cerutti** – 2007 until now.

There have been four associate directors: **John Hohl**, **Mike Wallen**, **Terry Reynolds**, and **Tony Colosimo**. Among the many assistant directors there were **Bob Adams**, **Bob Balderson**, **Dave Barton**, **Don Brastad**, **Will Cox**, **Larry Deters**, **Chuck Hunter**, **Mike Kelly**, **Jim Madison**, **Craig Odell**, **Terry Reynolds**, **Mike Riordan**, **Wilbur Sparks**, and **Dick Whitehouse**. And of course, there have been many section leaders who have helped the chorus grow and improve.

COMPETITION

In the 1970s, the chorus began to make its competitive mark, finally winning its first Southern Division contest in 1975 and first M-AD contest in 1977. As of this date, the Harmonizers have won 26 M-AD championships, competed at 28 International contests plus the 1953 invitational chorus event in Detroit, and earned 20 International medals including four golds: 1986 in Salt Lake City, 1989 in Kansas City, 1995 in Miami Beach, and 1998 in Atlanta.

Some will say that one of the best successes was when we won the M-AD contest for the first time and then earned a fourth place medal at the ensuing 1978 International in Cincinnati. Others suggest that the 1998 gold medal performance was another major contest milestone. Our ballad, arranged by **Walter Lutzko**, was “In the Wee Small Hours of the Morning” with lines inserted from the beautiful song, “Always”. (This arrangement was one of the 28 of his arrangements for the Harmonizers.) The uptune was a medley of “Everybody Loves My Baby” and “Steppin’ Out with My Baby” arranged by **Ed Waesche**. There were 124 of us on stage and we scored 2,793 or 93.1 percent. **Scott Werner** was director for all four of the gold medals. He was assisted by **Geri Geis**, who created the performance plans.

Special coaches helped us shine. Out-of-chapter coaches for musical and visual matters are still an important part of the current Harmonizer story and that list is like reading a BHS “Who’s Who”: **Stephanie Brickston**, **Jim Casey**, **Greg Clancy**, **Don Claus**, **Tony DeRosa**, **Mo Field**,

Darryl Flinn, Jay Giallombardo, Brandon Guyton, Jim Henry, Kevin Keller, Rasmus Krigstrom, Greg Lyne, David McEachern, Steve Plumb, Steve Scott, Steve Tramack, David Wright, and Kirk Young.

For several years **Geri Geis** was artistic director and helped us establish our reputation for artistic performance. **Cindy Hansen Ellis** worked with us in recent years, as did **Carlos Barillo**, who joined the chorus and was named choreographer in 2014. Most recently, **Cy Wood** joined the chapter and has been the major coach for choreography.

In-house stage presence teams helped the chorus expand its entertainment skills beginning with chairmen like **Jed Casey, Jay Hargrove, Jack Pitzer, and Craig Odell**. In later years, other members stepped up to help with performance preparations: **Turner Arndt, Chris Buechler, Scipio Garling, Chuck McKeever, Jim Murphy, Craig Kujawa, Gary Plaag, Bruce Roehm, Dean Rust, and Larry Silva.**

Chorus retreats have been a major training tool in preparing the Harmonizer for competition. All members attend and there are one or two guest coaches. The first retreat was in Fredericksburg, VA, then we started going out of town such as to Ocean City, MD and then most recently to McDaniel College in Westminster, MD. **Chuck McKeever** served as coordinator of a team to manage these retreats for many years. **Craig Kujawa** is coordinator currently.

At the retreats the chapter has recognized the new class (all members who had not yet sung on the International stage with the chorus). They wear special bandanas and shed them on the morning of the contest in July. The class also traditionally presents a skit at the retreat.

The Alexandria Harmonizers did not compete in the Las Vegas 2017 International contest – instead 75 members attended the BHS week-long Harmony University (HU) on the Belmont University campus in Nashville, TN. It was a very beneficial event and rated as one of the chapter's history milestones. Several members of the chapter were on the HU faculty or staff and all members attended classes of their own interest, in addition to the chorus coaching sessions.

And the always-competitive Harmonizer chorus returned to the International stage in Orlando, FL, with 84 singers with our director **Joe Cerutti** for 2018. The ballad was “We Kiss In A Shadow” arranged by **David Wright**, and the uptune was “Blow, Gabriel, Blow” arranged by **Rasmus Krigstrom**. We earned 2,728 points, 90.9% and an eighth place finish!

The chorus did not compete in 2019 in Salt Lake City because the chapter planned to travel to Scotland and England. It also did not compete in 2020 and 2021 since those contests were cancelled during the COVID pandemic.

In 2022, the Harmonizers returned to International competition and earned a third place medal for their package of “Oh What a Beautiful Morning” arranged by **David Wright**, and “42nd Street” arranged by **Kevin Keller**. The Harmonizer score was 2,788 – 92.9 percent. Choreography for the uptune was designed by **Cy Wood**. For the spectacular uptune ending, the chapter reached out to find a dance group to help. Seven men from *17th Street Dance*, a part of the Washington, DC, Gay Men's Chorus, agreed to perform with the chorus in Charlotte, NC, at the International in July.

In the end, the Alexandria Harmonizers were back “in the medals” with a third place finish. It was a great success story of team work, coping with COVID, terrific work by members on their own, great support of family and friends, two fantastic arrangements, a fabulous front row with the tap dancers, an active music team, and a huge infusion of new talent with the Class of 2022.

Musical arrangers have also helped us succeed in the contests and in our show production work such as **Bob Adams, Jim Clancy, Renee Craig, Clay Hine, John Hohl, Rob Hopkins, Kevin Keller, Fred King, Rasmus Krigstrom, Walter Latzko, Greg Lyne, Jeff Taylor, Steve Tramack, Ed Waesche, Scott Werner, Dick Whitehouse, and David Wright.**

True to form, the Alexandria chapter has always been super organized for contests, so when the new Ops Team was formed with a contest director on the team, **Craig Kujawa** was the first to serve in that capacity. He set the standard for the job with complete details and information provided to all members to help them participate fully at a barbershop convention at any level such as division, district and international.

In the history of the chapter, there have been many Harmonizers who were certified as Society contest judges. Here is the best try at recalling all of them: **Dr. Harold (Bud) Arberg, Chris Buechler, Jay Butterfield, Jed Casey, Joe Cerutti Jr., Dwain Chambers, Bill Cody, Tony Colosimo, Larry Deters, Sean Devine, W.L. (Buck) Dominy, Darryl Flinn, Chuck Harner, John Hohl, Keith Jones, Rasmus Krigstrom, Alan Lamson, Walter Latzko, Richard Lewellen, Mike Louque, Oz Newgard, Craig Odell, Jack Pitzer, Gary Plaag, John Santora, Hal Schultz, Dean Snyder, Wilbur Sparks, Phil Stern, Jack Stevens, Scott Werner, and Fred Womer.**

Uniforms from the past often get talked about, too, such as the wild yellow and green suits that scored high in stage presence in 1978, or our popular red, white, and blue leisure suits when they were in style. We have had a few tux outfits, including white ones, and the front row has used pop-up top hats and even snap canes. And of course, we have had a number of Velcro tear-away uniform changes over the years.

The casual uniform in recent years is a black short sleeve camp shirt with a Harmonizer logo on the left pocket. It is worn with jeans and black shoes.

We started using the end caps again in 2010 (to expand the risers into a curved formation to hold more singers). They were a signature item for the Harmonizers in contests and formal shows beginning in 1998 but they have not been used in recent years.

For the M-AD contest package during the 75th anniversary, the chorus will bring back “Wee Small Hours of the Morning/Always” and “New York, New York.”

PERFORMANCES

The Harmonizer’s good singing and excellent performance packages led to unique opportunities to showcase our members, such as at the Kennedy Center Honors in 1987 for **Perry Como**; 1997 for **Charlton Heston**; 2000 for **Angela Lansbury**; 2001 for **Van Cliburn**; and 2003 for **Mike Nichols**; three Carnegie Hall performances; singing with **Dick Van Dyke** at Disneyland; Wolf Trap’s 20th anniversary gala with **Rosemary Clooney, Michael Feinstein** and the **Canadian**

Brass; an 80th birthday special for **Victor Borge**; and a performance to help **Elizabeth Taylor** launch a new perfume.

The Harmonizers have made nine appearances at the Supreme Court building in DC for The Historical Society for the Supreme Court. For the 2019 appearance, the banquet hall was packed and we had to fit the risers into a small space. That meant the singers were really singing close together – and director **Joe Cerutti** was only a couple feet in front of the chorus standing among the banquet guests. As has been our tradition at this venue, we did no major stage presence.

The chorus or smaller ensembles from the chorus have appeared seven times at White House holiday parties, including a party for the Barack Obama family. Also our quartets have appeared on the stage at the annual lighting of the National Christmas tree.

The chorus has sung the National Anthem at NFL games, at a professional men's soccer game, and at a major league baseball game. One year the chorus was in the half-time show at RFK Stadium with the Washington Redskins Band and Chorus. In 2014, they sang in the Cherry Blossom parade and in 2015 appeared in the DC Pride parade for the Marriott Corporation. The chorus sang at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC, on Memorial Day in 1996. Since 2017, the chorus has hosted the Yale Whiffenpoofs and sung with them in Alexandria.

In recent years, the chorus has been part of a Veterans' Day event in the Del Ray area of Alexandria. Proudly, the many veterans in the chorus are recognized at this event too. The chorus often sings the "National Anthem," "Armed Forces Medley," "I'll Be Seeing You," and "God Bless America." **Dean Rust** has coordinated this event with the concert organizers.

The Alexandria Harmonizers appeared at the Strathmore Music Center in Bethesda Nov. 30, 2019, as part of that Center's holiday concert series. This holiday show was the first time Strathmore agreed to book the Harmonizers for our own show, which was designed and produced by the Harmonizers artistic team. The "Holidays in Harmony: An A Cappella Concert" featured the chorus plus the 2006 BHS gold medal quartet VOCAL SPECTRUM from St. Louis, and A Cappella! – a mixed chorus of students from James Hubert Blake High School in Montgomery County, MD, directed by **Sandra Zinkievich**.

The Alexandria Harmonizers joined forces with the Alexandria Singers to host "Together In Harmony" featuring Vocal Collective from Christchurch, New Zealand, in a concert Wednesday, March 20, 2019, at the George Washington Masonic National Memorial. The sellout crowd filled the auditorium in the Memorial as a tribute and in support of the victims of the shooting violence that had happened just days before in Christchurch. Vocal Collective was on tour in the USA and added the stop in Alexandria to join their barbershop friends for the concert. But after the massacre in their hometown, the trip took on a whole new dimension. About 200 singers combined for the finale of the show! The night started with remarks of encouragement and thanks from New Zealand Ambassador Rosemary Banks.

During the show, it was announced that the two Alexandria choruses would be giving their share of the show's profit to the New Zealand support fund and also that the venue hosts at the Masonic Memorial were yielding their fee for the use of the hall to help the fundraising effort

In 2022, the chorus was invited to sing at Wolf Trap at a “community-powered singing celebration” with several other choral groups from the DC Metro area. The show organizers asked the Harmonizers to sing “Circle of Life” which brought the audience to its feet when the song started and at the end!! The Harmonizers shared the program with seven other groups: Children’s Chorus of Washington, Duke Ellington School of the Arts Concert Chorale, Gay Men’s Chorus of Washington and GenOUT, The Heritage Signature Chorale, Towson University Singers, The Washington Chorus, and the Washington Performing Arts Gospel Chorus.

In recent years, the chorus made outdoor appearances at Arts on the Avenue in the Del Ray neighborhood of Alexandria.

Maybe one of the most unusual appearances for the Harmonizer chorus was at the Humane Resources Alliance Bark Ball in 2018 at the Washington Hilton. The audience of 1,000 formally dressed attendees and their canine friends welcomed the chorus to cheers and barking!

No history is complete without mentioning just some of the great songs we sang over the years, such as: *Red Rose Rag*, *Waitin’ on the Robert E. Lee*, *Cohan Medley*, *Music of the Night*, *Hooked on Classics*, *Guys and Dolls Medley*, *Director’s Lament*, *I’ll Build a Stairway to Paradise*, *New York - New York*, *Blue Moon*, *Glenn Miller Medley*, *One Voice*, *Slap That Bass*, *Jamaica Farewell*, *Kiss The Girl*, *Summertime*, *Brotherhood of Man*, *We Kiss in a Shadow*, *Anything Goes*, *Blow Gabriel Blow*, *Circle of Life*, *Empty Chairs at Empty Tables*, *Bring Him Home*, *For Good*, *Oh What a Beautiful Morning*, *42nd Street*, *Sit Down You’re Rockin the Boat*, *Something’s Comin*, *There Must Be a City* and songs from our gold medal packages: *Keep Your Sunny Side Up* and *You Can Have Every Light on Broadway* in 1986; *Oh How I Miss You Tonight* and *You’re Nobody’s Sweetheart Now* in 1989; *I’ll Be Seeing You* and *Sweet Georgia Brown* in 1995; and *Wee Small Hours of the Morning/Always* and *Everybody Loves My Baby/Steppin Out With My Baby* in 1998.

The chorus maintains a list of patriotic songs in the repertoire that can be used as needed, as well as a significant collection of holiday music to include popular new songs that come into the barbershop world. In recent years, musical leadership has begun a policy to significantly change the chorus repertoire each year.

SHOW PRODUCTION

Another important aspect of the chapter history was the early adoption of strong show production activities. The annual spring show called the Spring Tonic began in 1951 and was most often held in local high schools. Chapter members and their wives built elaborate sets and wrote funny and entertaining scripts. In recent years, our major shows were held in performing arts centers such as Schlesinger Hall on the Alexandria campus of Northern Virginia Community College; and our sell-out holiday dinner shows were held at First Baptist Church on King Street. Some shows and events have been at the George Washington Masonic National Memorial in Alexandria or at the Scottish Rite Temple in Alexandria or the one in Washington, DC.

Michael Organ joined the chapter in 1975 and brought a new energy for show production that members **Bob Bates**, **Gary Plaag**, and **Steve White** expanded upon for about 20 annual shows. Other members such as **Jack Stevens**, **Ken Fess** and **Greg Tepe** served as show producers for

various other package shows and **Dixie Kennett** was invited to light the 1989 Spring Tonic and many more shows after that. **Mike Kelly** took up that task in recent years.

Popular productions and themed shows from the past include the Toyland show, which we took on the road to many chapters in our district and to the M-AD convention. Other themed shows included a fraternity house; a knights and dragons melodrama; and shows with pirates, cowboys, magic acts, prisoners, World War I soldiers, and clowns. A radio show set in a local small town radio station with a sound effects guy, a detective, an office secretary and a cast of characters doing the radio advertisement spots, was so well-received that we repeated it a few years later.

Steve White and **Gary Plaag** created the first Santa's workshop shows, and in subsequent years **Scipio Garling** and **Josh Roots** wrote and produced the holiday shows with a jack-in-the-box (played by **Terry Reynolds**), and toys and elves (played by the chorus members). These popular dinner shows where chorus members were both waiters and singers were held at the First Baptist Church on King Street. Santa and Mrs. Claus (aka **Bruce** and **Ginny Minnick**) were part of these shows too.

SPECIAL BARBERSHOP SHOWS

Over the years we have had some special feature shows like the 2010 joint show with Westminster chorus from Southern California and seven top quartets from around the world. In 1987 we hosted a joint show featuring the multiple gold-medal winning chorus, the Vocal Majority, from Dallas, TX, at Constitution Hall in DC. **Father Joe Witmer** was the show chairman who had the courage to make it happen. **Chuck Harner** managed our performances with The King's Singers at the Kennedy Center in 1983 – their first in the DC area.

In 2014, we hosted the 120-man Ambassadors of Harmony chorus from St. Louis to stay in our homes, tour DC, sing a “flash mob” at the World War II Memorial, and then join us for a huge show on June 21 at George Mason University in Fairfax.

Then in the fall, we co-sponsored a show with the Pride of Baltimore chorus just prior to the start of the Sweet Adeline International (SAI) convention that was in Baltimore. It featured many top-ranked SAI and BHS quartets, plus the two local choruses and a championship SAI chorus from Sweden, Ronnige Show Chorus. **Ken Fess** and **Mick Stamps** made this event happen.

The Harmonizers have sung jointly with Sweet Adeline choruses including gold medalist Ramapo Valley, gold medalist Vienna Falls, silver medalist Pride of Baltimore, as well as the Potomac Harmony Chorus.

For several summers the chorus performed in the 6,000-seat grand auditorium in Ocean Grove, NJ, as the barbershop guest artists in their summer series in this quaint ocean-front town.

In January 1961 the chapter joined the DC Chapter for a show featuring the famous BUFFALO BILLS, from “The Music Man” Broadway and movie fame. Then in December, we hosted the “BILLS” again for a Sunday afternoon show. In 1964, we had them back for a third visit at Francis Hammond High School.

Other fun chapter events were our exchanges with the Cincinnati Western Hills chorus. They

came to Virginia and did their zany Robin Hood show, and we went to Ohio and presented our Toyland show. **Mike Everard** organized both of these exchanges including our stay in each-others' homes. **Ken Rub** produced a show featuring ROCKAPELLA to help us attract a younger and diverse musical audience.

Long-time chorus fan Senator John Glenn and his wife attended our annual shows for many years. In 1998, he took two of our CDs with him on his second trip into space on the DISCOVERY shuttle. After he returned, he autographed them both and they were then donated to the BHS Museum in Nashville.

HARMONIZER 50TH ANNIVERSARY

Mike Everard was chairman of the major 50th anniversary celebration including a reunion show. A committee worked for three years to organize all the events. Chapter historian **Gary Smith** assumed responsibility for creating fantastic historic display boards. He also headed up the creation and publication of *Breathless Moments* – The Alexandria Harmonizers 1948-1998.

The chapter presented "Golden Star Awards" to seven folks who had made major contributions to the chapter – **Dean Snyder** our co-founder; **Eugene Barnwell** our co-founder and first director; **Wilbur Sparks** often called Mr. Barbershop for all the contributions he had made; **Bud Arberg** our second chorus director; **Geri Geis** for her years of creative choreography; **Scott Werner** director for 30 years including the four gold medals; and **Maxine Millard** often called our Number One Fan.

The big event was a reunion weekend and show on September 12, 1998. Many former members were invited to attend and sing on the show, join in social events and participate in the silent auction at the Alexandria Holiday Inn. The show was at T.C. Williams High School and titled *Once in a Lifetime, Maybe*. Six past quartets sang on the show – NOVA CHORDS, FRIENDSHIP FIRE COMPANY, RIVERSIDE ASSEMBLY, ALEXANDRIA'S RAGTIME BAND, COPYRIGHT 86, and VARSITY CLUB. And four current quartets sang – FOUR MAN VOCAL BAND, REMINISCE, THE BAY RUM RUNNERS and PREMIER.

Bud Arberg directed a small chorus representing the 1940s; **Dick Whitehouse** directed another chorus of the 1950s and 60s; **Scott Werner** directed a chorus of the 1970s and 80s; and **Mike Wallen** directed a chorus of the 1990s. Finally, the 1998 International Chorus Champion Harmonizers performed their winning contest set. President **Alan Wile** presented framed gold chorus medals to founder **Dean Snyder** and arranger **Walter Latzko**.

HARMONIZER 70TH ANNIVERSARY

In 2018, the chapter and many former members celebrated the 70-year rich history of musical excellence, barbershop leadership and brotherhood at a show titled *Platinum Moments* at 4 pm on Saturday, September 8th at Schlesinger Hall on the campus of the NoVA Community College in Alexandria. We were joined by Toronto Northern Lights (TNL) chorus, from Canada; and by SIGNATURE quartet from Florida. The TNL guys toured DC including the Capitol arranged by **Nick Leiserson**. They arrived mostly by automobile on Thursday and Friday.

The then silver medalist quartet came to town on Wednesday and spent Thursday and Friday

visiting schools in the DC area introducing youth and music educators to a cappella singing and promoting our spring Youth Harmony Festival. Education director, **Sheryl Berlin**, coordinated that effort.

The special guests for the show included **Geri Geis** – artistic director and choreographer during the Gold Medal chorus era; **Cindy Hansen Ellis** – choreographer and presentation coach and performance motivator since 2004 for contests, show and major performances; **Dr. Rob Hopkins** – arranger of our gold medal ballad “I’ll Be Seeing You” in 1995; **Eric Jackson** – the lyricist for the intro verse of that same ballad; **Majorie Lutzko** – wife of **Walter**, who arranged our 1998 gold medal ballad “In The Wee Small Hours” and 28 other songs for the Harmonizers (she was tenor in the famous CHORDETTES of “Mr. Sandman” fame); **Richard Lewellen** – director 2003-2006 when we performed the contest package with “Lazy Bones” and “Summertime;” **Mike Wallen** – one of the four associate directors for the chapter; and **Scott Werner** – musical director for 30 years. Overall emcee for the show was **Marty Monson** – CEO/Executive Director of the Barbershop Harmony Society.

The songs the Harmonizers sang for this show were chosen by survey ballot sent to fans and family. We sang the top six vote getters and re-learned the music and the stage presence for the major contest uptunes that had earned gold medals or songs that had been part of major shows during the past. The Harmonizers sang the 1998 gold medal uptune “Steppin’ Out” with lots of uniform surprises like the popup top hats, and disappearing ascots, and plenty of dancing by the whole chorus.

Then **Scott Werner** was introduced to direct the top vote getting song – “I’ll Be Seeing You” from our 1995 gold medal performance. It was the favorite Harmonizer song of all time and has been sung on many shows and concerts over the years. For this show, it was sung by both Alexandria and Toronto.

The amazing finale for the show was the Jay Giallombardo’s arrangement of “American/Canadian Ode to Joy” with both choruses and SIGNATURE and guest quartet from TNL. This terrific arrangement featured a weaving of the American and Canadian National Anthems and Beethoven’s “Ode to Joy.”

Both the Alexandria City Council and the Virginia Legislature passed formal proclamations congratulating the Harmonizers on their 70th anniversary. The Alexandria proclamation was presented by Mayor Allison Silberberg and the joint resolution from the Virginia Legislature was presented by Charniele Herring, who represents Alexandria in the Virginia House of Delegates.

A lobby display coordinated by the chapter’s history committee featured a tribute of the four gold medal contest appearances with a framed collage of the photo, the medal and the contest program. The exhibit also had a collage of items from the earliest years of the chapter, such as the charter and earliest quartet pictures. There was also a framed autographed CD that Harmonizer fan, John Glenn, took to space! Finally there was the chorus photo at Wolf Trapp with Victor Borge, and a poster from our trip to Normandy, France.

After the show, there was a Platinum Affair for performers and their guests at the Lee Center a few blocks away. It was a great wrap-up event to celebrate.

FUNDRAISING AND FINANCES

Many of our shows were financially successful. However, the Harmonizers' largest non-musical fundraising project might have been our sales of Wisconsin cheese products, selling over 20 tons of cheese from 1976 through 1998. **Jack Pitzer** started the sales project and **Dick Hall** managed it for many years until the market changed. For a few years, we sold White House Christmas ornaments with **Chris Buechler**, then **Sandy Stamps**, as honcho. Also, we sold Entertainment books with **Chuck Harner** as honcho.

Our scrip sales program began when **Christina Lewellen** helped get it started. It has become a growing source of income in recent years with the promotional efforts of **Craig Kujawa** and **Ken Ives**.

Also in April in recent years, thanks to past president **Randall Eliason**, the chapter began to earn significant monies as a participant in the Alexandria Spring2ACTion program – an all-day fundraising event for local nonprofits. We were one of the community's arts group participants. Our fans and supporters were able to donate all day.

Some years, the chorus gathered at Virtue Feed and Grain in Old Town to sing for patrons there and the restaurant donated a share of their sales. Mayor Allison Silberberg stopped to see us and presented a City of Alexandria Proclamation recognizing our 70th anniversary. In 2022, the chapter raised over \$35,000 plus \$1,250 in prizes for the most donors in a power house contest.

During the April 26, 2023, Spring2ACTion, the chorus collected over \$78,000 starting with two \$25,000 matching gifts. In addition, the chapter won the \$1,250 again. This year's push was organized by development director **Ken Rub** with help from executive director **Randall Eliason** and general manager **Susan Fitzpatrick**. Chapter members helped encourage donations by promoting to their contacts and patrons. A "watch party" that evening included a terrific cabaret of talented members from the chapter who sang and performed as we waited to see the total donations surpass the original \$75,000 goal. The party was at the Bike Club in Alexandria. A crawfish boil in early May celebrated the successful fundraising event. **Scott Kahler** came from New Orleans as the chef for this fun chapter event at the Harmo House.

In recent years, **Bruce Roehm** promoted Giving Tuesday campaigns for the chapter.

We produced several LP albums to sell including "Harmony Heritage" in 1968 and "Show Souvenirs" in 1974, followed by "A Gift of Music" cassette in 1983. We made 16 albums of the M-AD annual fall chorus contest from 1972-87, as a fundraiser for our chapter and the district, produced by **Mike Everard**. Then as technologies changed, we produced CDs including "Havin' Fun" in 1987; "Photographs and Memories" in 1990; "Show Favorites" in 1994; "Live on Stage" in 1997; "Wee Small Hours" in 2002; "Comfort and Joy" in 2005; "Choir of the World Concert" in 2010; and "American Icon" in 2015.

Some years we have had financially successful silent auctions at our shows – especially at the holiday shows. Members and friends secured donations and then volunteers managed the auction in the lobby of the shows. **Brad Jones** and his crew initiated these auctions and then other leaders have carried on the work including **Randall Eliason**, **Kristen Kelly**, **Don Dillingham**, and **Sandra Deltac**.

The chapter is supported by the Alexandria Department of Recreation, Parks and Activities, and has received grants from the Alexandria and Virginia Commissions for the Arts in support of the chapter's programs dating back many years. **Dean Rust** assumed the grant writing duties in 2017 and found new grant sources from the Virginia Commission which, along with Alexandria, totaled \$90,000 through 2022.

The Harmonizers have also received grants from the Barbershop Harmony Society for outreach to youth and the community, notably a \$20,000 grant in 2017 that supported a year-long celebration of traditional African American gospel (1890-1920) as the forerunner of the barbershop style. Approaches to other private foundations that fund the arts have not been successful to date.

Beginning in 2022, the chapter was accepted on the Touring Directory maintained by the Virginia Commission for the Arts. Virginia venues that hire from this Directory are eligible for subsidies to offset artists' fees. This program led to a Harmonizer show in the Northern Neck in April 2022 for the Rappahannock Concert Association in Heathville, VA, and to a feature slot at an April 2023 music festival at Christopher Newport University in Newport News, VA.

The chapter is a long-time member of the Alexandria Arts Alliance too.

Harmonizer alum **David Wilt** has provided a major financial pledge of support for the chorus for the 75th anniversary year and beyond. Dave was a member of the chapter from 1975-2002, and served as a chapter vice president and stage presence instructor. He currently resides in Florida and was with the chapter at the 2022 International contest in Charlotte, NC. He has always been a strong supporter of the chapter and purchased the first Harmo-truck when he was a member.

WORLD TRAVEL

The Harmonizers have experienced several major trips to other countries. In 2012, 65 singers went to China where they sang for two Chinese audiences, including an appearance on The Great Wall. Part of that trip included a joint appearance with our friends from the Toronto Northern Lights at the Forbidden City concert hall. This trip was planned and executed by **Brad Jones**.

A highlight of 2014 was our trip to Normandy, France, for the 70th anniversary of the D-Day Landing. To prepare for that trip, we hosted our first Armed Forces Day show in Alexandria for World War II veterans including our own **Paul Greiner**.

For the trip to France, 100 singers and 150 other Harmonizer family and friends flew to Paris and on to the Normandy area. We appeared at three tribute events there – at the American Cemetery in Brittany; at the musical salute to Liberation and parade in St. Mere Eglise; and at the American Cemetery at Omaha Beach. Many members were able to pay tribute at graves of their own relatives.

For many, the crowning moment was the celebration and appearance for the small town of Les Ventes, France – which honors USA pilot Billie D. Harris, who saved their town in a selfless move of crashing his plane into a nearby field instead of into the middle of the village. The greatest moment there was singing “Bring Him Home” to his widow, Peggy, who made the trip to be with us. **Tony Colosimo** sang the solo message to her and we all cried. Thanks to **Chris**

Huber for arranging for this experience during our trip.

Ken Fess and **Mick Stamps** plus **Peter Hubbard** and **Chuck Hunter** did yeoman work to plan, organize, coordinate, and translate to get us all there and home. Many members and families spent extra time in Europe as part of the trip. Also during the trip we sang concerts at the Cathedral Notre Dame de Chartres, in Paris; at the famous cathedral in Köln, Germany; and a barbershop show with our new friends of the Erster Koelner chorus who are members of Barbershop in Germany (BinG!).

The Alexandria Harmonizers enjoyed a successful tour of the United Kingdom from August 5-12, 2019, bringing their new “Circle of Life” repertoire to northern England and Scotland. The chorus presented a “master class” on vocal production and chorus rehearsal practices, conducted by director **Joe Cerutti** and associate director **Tony Colosimo**. The class was attended by several members of the Cottontown Chorus, then-current British Association of Barbershop Singers (BABS) gold medal chorus, as well as other interested local citizens.

Also the chorus took a bus ride to Alexandria’s sister city, Dundee, Scotland. Following the concert, the Harmonizers presented the Lord Provost (mayor) of Dundee with a proclamation from the Mayor of Alexandria proclaiming August 9th, 2019, to be “Alexandria-Dundee Kinship Day.”

OUTREACH

During 2017, the chapter launched an effort to explore the roots of barbershop harmony and sing some of the music that was a part of that early era. That effort included meeting with and singing for Dr. Ysaye Barnwell noted for her singing with SWEET HONEY IN THE ROCK and for her arranging and composition. Our music team had taught us three songs by rote originally done by Grammy-winning THE FAIRFIELD FOUR. Later, we joined Dr. Barnwell’s community sing in DC. We also spent one chapter meeting to have a workshop on inclusion with guest presenter and facilitator Dr. Sheila Peters from Fisk University in Nashville.

We reached out to Dr. Joyce Garrett, long-time director of music at Alfred Street Baptist Church in Alexandria to initiate fellowship and to sing for and with the men’s choir from Alfred Street. In May 2017, we co-hosted an Alexandria City two-day festival called “Music Through the Ages: Gospel and Barbershop” where we sang with several other local gospel groups on Friday and Saturday nights. The chapter sponsored THE FAIRFIELD FOUR guest appearance for those shows as well as our fall show.

By 2019, this outreach had emerged as a Men’s A Cappella Choral Fellowship co-hosted by the Alfred Street Men’s Choir and the Harmonizers. There were 200 men singing at the 2019 event at the Alfred Street Baptist Church, and a similar crowd at the SRT in 2022.

A major musical experience in 2016 for the Harmonizers was singing two performances of “I Am Harvey Milk” at The Music Center at Strathmore in Bethesda, MD, with the National Philharmonic; Kristin Chenoweth, well known for her role in “Wicked;” and Andrew Lippa, creator of the oratorio. We rehearsed on this choral piece in tenor one, tenor two, baritone and bass sections starting in January leading up to the April 23-24 shows. There were 12 works in the piece. There were 110 singers including a dozen men from outside the chapter who auditioned to sing this event.

In 2018, the chorus was invited again to participate in a major premier presentation at Strathmore, to provide the major choir for an original work called “Iron and Coal – Survivor, and Son.” The rock music work was created by composer and lyricist Jeremy Schonfeld as a multimedia event to pay tribute to his father’s experiences leading up to and including his time in Auschwitz. About 70 Harmonizers and 40 women, who auditioned to sing, formed the choir.

The Harmonizers traveled to the Seneca Land District (SLD) fall contest and convention in Rochester, NY, September 27-28, 2019, to sing, entertain, share ideas, and spread the fun of our hobby. The Harmonizers chorus sang for score and evaluation in that contest and earned an 87.4% with 53 singers. As a surprise, **Joe** invited the judges to select the two songs we would sing from four panels we showed them labeled ballad-uptune-ballad-uptune. **Joe** asked the contest administrators to choose and they chose a ballad and an uptune. Then we uncovered the sign and learned which songs we would perform. We sang “We Kiss In a Shadow” and “Blow, Gabriel, Blow.” The audience asked to know the other two choices and we let them see it could have been “I’ll Be Seeing You” and “Anything Goes.”

Then to wrap up our musical part of the weekend, the chorus changed to their blue contest suits with orange tie and pocket stuffer for the finale of the Show of Shows after the quartet champs were chosen. They performed the “Circle of Life” package and ended their portion of this event (as our way of saying thanks and to say it was great to make all these new friends) by singing “For Good.”

An annual outreach within Alexandria is the December holiday season “carol crawl” when the chorus sings holiday music up and down King Street in Old Town Alexandria. Usually there is a stop at Market Square and at the Torpedo Factory; as well as stops at local restaurants.

The chapter holds its annual Youth Harmony Festival with a chorus for young men and a chorus for young women – the first one in 2008. **Brad Jones** headed up this activity in the early years with help from the chapter auxiliary, many members of the chapter including the musical leaders and nearby Sweet Adeline chapters. Recently this project has been headed by the chapter’s education director, **Sheryl Berlin**. Over 100 students attended in 2019.

Over the years the chapter has invited quartets from outside the chapter to come help as section leaders and to perform for the youth such as GQ, THE LADIES, GIMME FOUR, THE QUINTONES, and SIGNATURE. The one-day event ends with a concert for the parents of the youth chorus and the Harmonizers sing a few songs as does the youth chorus from the festival.

QUARTETS AND SMALL ENSEMBLES

The strong music program over the years yielded many quartets and some of them earned high marks in the barbershop contest world. Their successes led to more chapter and chorus successes as coaches and good musical arrangements came our way because of them.

The most notable were the NOVA CHORDS with **John Adams, Scott Werner, John Hohl** and **Dick Whitehouse** third-place bronze medalists in 1976, VAUDEVILLE with **John Casey, Scott Werner, John Hohl**, and **Bill Cody**, second-place silver medalists in 1985, BSQ with **Rick Taylor**, third place medalists in 2000; RIPTIDE with **Richard Lewellen**, third place medalists in 2004; OLD SCHOOL with **Rick Taylor** fifth place medalists in 2008.

Most recently, THROWBACK with **Sean Devine** earned third place at the 2022 contest in Charlotte, and FIRST TAKE earned a fifth place medal with **Tony Colosimo** as lead and **Andrew Havens** as bass.

Other chapter quartets helped the chapter make history, such as PROFESSORS OF HARMONY; THE BUREAUCRATS; FRIENDSHIP FIRE COMPANY (with **Mike Everard** always on bass and about a dozen leads and baritones over the years); HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, which is registered each year by the chapter and made up of our section leaders; and FOUR FROM THE HEART, a group of guys organized by **Bruce Lauther** who would sing any time or place and did so several times a year

Over the years there have been many district champion quartets comprised of Harmonizers. Some of those members have earned the honor more than once. (The bold names were members at the time they won, or have joined our chapter later.)

1968 – NOVA CHORDS – **John Adams, Scott Werner, Brian Rodda, Dick Whitehouse**

1977 – SUSSEX COUNTS – Ron Allen, **Jim Marberger**, Carroll Beard, **Jon Lowe**

1981 – VAUDEVILLE – **Harold Nantz, Scott Werner, John Hohl, Bill Cody**

1985 – ALEXANDRIA'S RAGTIME BAND – **John Adams, Mike Wallen, Alan Durick, Craig Odell**

1988 – COPYRIGHT 86 – **Bill Colosimo, John Casey, Mike Wallen, Steve White**

1992 – ARCADE – Dave Hinman, Diz Disney, **Rick Taylor**, Jim Grant

1994 – BINGO BROTHERS – **John Casey, Fred Womer, Dennis Malone**, Gary Parker

1996 – THE BAY RUM RUNNERS – **Ed Cazenias, Lynn Conaway, Barry Galloway, Steve White**

1997 – PREMIERE – **Rick Savage, Fred Womer, Dennis Malone, Bill Clark**

1999 – HIJINX – **Gary Plaag, Will Cox, Howard Hull, Chip Guffey**

2000 – CASINO – **Mike Wallen, Scott Disney**, Michael Gellert, **Mike Kelly**

2003 – WHEELHOUSE – Brandon Brooks, Rich Gray Jr., Jeff Gray, **Mike Kelly**

2004 – PHAT CATS – **Ed Cazenias, Scott Disney, Mike Pinto, Steve White**

2005 – IGUANAS IN FLIGHT – **Joe Sawyer, Tony Colosimo**, Andrew Kay, **Wayne Adams**

2006 – FOUR ACES – **Ed Cazenias, Nick Aiuto, Richard Lewellen, Scott Risley**

2007 – RINGERS – Rob Seay, **Scott Disney, Mike Pinto**, Al Mazzoni

2008 – NEW RELEASE – Ryan Griffith, Shawn Thomas, Noah Morrison, **Joe Eckert**

2009 – OLD SCHOOL – **Rick Taylor**, Joe Connelly, Jack Pinto, Joe Kronos

2011 – TOUCHSTONE – Rob Seay, Rich Gray, **Jay Butterfield, Steve White**

2012 – MAD HATTERS – Rob Seay, **Scott Disney, Rick Taylor, Steve White**

2014 – MAYHEM – Matt Fellows, **Pookie Dingle, Mike Pinto, Ken White**

2015 – LAST MEN STANDING – TJ Barringer, Drew Freyrer, Ed Bell, **Mike Kelly**

2016 – ROUTE 1- Brian Schreiner, **Scott Disney**, Brandon Brooks, Thomas Moyer

2017 – DA CAPO – **Ryan Griffith, Tony Colosimo, Joe Sawyer, Andrew Havens**

2023 – FIRST TAKE – Alex Corson, **Tony Colosimo**, Drew Wheaton, **Andrew Havens**

We have also had some senior quartets earn high marks. The first Society Seniors Quartet Contest was in 1986 and one of the quartet contestants was THE MOUNT RUSHMORE FOUR featuring past Society presidents recreating the famed landmark. Gil Lefholz, 1986 president as

Teddy Roosevelt; Hank Vomacka, 1983, as George Washington; Richard Ellenberger, 1975, as Abraham Lincoln, and **Wilbur Sparks**, 1970, as Thomas Jefferson.

One gold medal winner of the BHS Seniors contest was REMINISCE in 1995 with **John Adams, Scott Werner, Alan Durick, and Dick Whitehouse**. Other senior quartets of note were AULD LANG SYNE with **Bob Wilson, Scott Werner, John Hohl, and Bill Cody**, third place medalists in 2003; CITY SLICKERS with **Bob Caldwell**, fourth place medalists also in 2003; and YOUTH RECLAMATION PROJECT with **Mike Wallen** who were recently recognized as the oldest quartet (based on accumulated age) at the 2017 Midwinter Convention (this quartet changed its name in 2019 to QUIRKS OF ART with **Bob Wilson, Roger Tarpy, Hardman Jones and Mike Wallen**).

Also, SILVER ALERT with **Rick Savage, Mike Edison, Will Cox and Steve Murane** were M-AD Seniors Champs in 2018. They competed at the Midwinter BHS Convention in 2019 along with PERCUSSION quartet with **Mike Kelly** as bass.

On the other side of the coin, some of our younger members have done well in the collegiate quartet contest: ROADTRIP won the gold with **Tony Colosimo** singing lead in 2007. IGUANAS IN FLIGHT earned second in 2002 with **Joe Sawyer** singing tenor, **Tony Colosimo** singing lead and **Wayne Adams** singing bass. NEW RELEASE earned second in 2005 with **Joe Eckert** singing bass. **Eric Wallen** sang bass in CRUNCH TIME and earned fifth place in the 2008 collegiate contest.

JEFFERSON PLAID TIE sang in the 2022 Next Generation Quartet contest for singers age 27 and younger. **Lance Fisher** sang with that quartet and they tied for first place. The tie was broken by the singing score and so **Lance** earned a second place medal in that event.

In 2017, **Bill Colosimo** represented the chapter in the first M-AD mixed quartet contest and his quartet, SERENDIPITY, with **Sheryl Berlin, Anne Bureau, and Ig Jakovac** took first place. In 2018, BLIND WIVES quartet with **Tony Colosimo** and his wife **Elizabeth** and **Andrew Havens** and his wife **Heather** won the M-AD mixed quartet contest. They are now known as BETTER TOGETHER and competed in the Mid Atlantic Sweepstakes contest in Alexandria in Feb. 2019, were mic testers at the International quartet contest in 2022, and winners of the Southern Division contest in 2023.

Our chapter launched CAPITAL FORCE – a 20-25 man ensemble of under-30-years-of-age singers from the Greater DC area with **Tony Colosimo** as director – and they participated in the youth chorus events at Society midwinter conventions in Vegas in 2010 and in Orlando in 2013.

In 2011, director **Joe Cerutti** and **Scott Kahler** created a No Border Youth Chorus. The 80 singers auditioned from around the nation and around the world. They met during December holidays and sang at Carnegie Hall in NYC. Their repertoire was sent to them for learning prior to arrival in NYC. The No Border Chorus continued in 2012 and 2013.

TBD, a modern a cappella group, was formed in 2008 by **Tom Kraus** and **Scipio Garling**. The group appeared with the chorus and made appearances of their own during the years. TBD was disbanded when key members of the group moved and/or took on other chorus duties. **Reed Livergood** was the last director of TBD.

Ken Rub helped launch our first Aca Challenge in 2014 to recognize local area a cappella groups. The successful event continued until 2018. The Saturday evening event featured the chorus, TBD from within the chorus, and a contest for six groups from around the Northeast. Those groups were chosen by the chapter in an audition process. The first place winner received a \$2,000 prize. The panel of a cappella judges combined their choice with the electronic vote by the audience. The event was most often held at the famous Lincoln Theater on U Street in Washington, DC. In 2018, the event was at the 6th Street & I Street Historic Synagogue in Washington, DC, with Deke Sharon as emcee.

In addition to the TBD ensemble, there have been two other ensembles (both VLQ – very large quartets) that appeared on shows and sang for audiences in the DC area: THE HOMETOWNERS in the 1970s and CAMERON STATION in 2007-09.

Since 1966 when **Wilbur Sparks** proposed the first one, the chapter has hosted the “Put-Together” Quartet contest. Members were encouraged to form a quartet or the contest chairman would “put” guys into a quartet. The event yielded new quartets to move on to other contests or sing on shows. Prizes are given for comedy quartets or regular quartets based on adjudication by guest judges. This event continued in 2020 with 17 quartet entries and will be held again in 2023 with **Tyler Carpenter** as coordinator.

COMMUNICATIONS

One important aspect of the chapter history has been our efforts to communicate effectively. We used the typical formats for news releases, displays, and radio announcements for ticket sales and recruitment. Several Harmonizers have been honored at the Society level for their work in public relations including **Terry Jordan, Alan Wile, Martin Banks, and Father Joe Witmer**. **Wilbur Sparks** was well known as the editor (the original **YeEd**) of our chapter bulletin, *THE ECHO*, although he was not the first editor. **Scipio Garling** served a term as editor and produced a landmark edition on diversity that garnered much attention across the Society.

Clark Chesser was editor of *THE ECHO* when it was designed as an electronic vehicle to communicate with friends, family and customers. **Frank Shipp** has been the most recent editor of *THE ECHO*. The historical aspects of the old *Echo* are now published as a *Looking Back* blog after each chapter meeting and event by **Jack Pitzer**.

The chapter produces an extensive annual report which began in 2010 and has been published by **Steve White** for many years.

Over the years, the chapter has presented an Award of Harmony to local leaders that have made a difference in the arts community, including local congressional and city leaders, restauranteurs, arts benefactors, city staff members, arts council representatives, and other a cappella groups. The most recent recipients was **Dr. Joyce Garrett** from the Alfred Street Baptist Church who is co-coordinator of the Men’s A Cappella Fellowship event with the chapter; and in 2022, **Joi Brown**, Vice President of Programing and Artistic Director at Strathmore Center was the recipient.

Another award that was given from 1995-2005 was the Jack Shields Music Scholarship (in honor

of **Jack Shields** who was a community organizer for the chapter from 1984-92). It went to music educators or students to recognize their efforts to further singing of barbershop harmony in their educational institution.

TECHNOLOGY

In the earliest years of the chapter, **Henry Brown** made reel-to-reel tapes of shows and performances for historical reasons.

The Harmonizers first website was created in 1996. Also during the 1990s, the chorus abandoned the printed version of the *HarmoGram* – a weekly publication of the rehearsal schedule and upcoming events - in favor of a weekly email. Plus by the 2000s, the need for the physical ‘mailboxes’ for each member (used to pass out music, announcements, and forms) were gone and the color-coded milk crates and matching folders for each man were discontinued.

Eventually the HarmoGram became an electronic publication produced weekly by **Steve White**. **Dave Branstetter** took over for a few years after Steve. It was used to relay the weekly plans for the chorus rehearsal including details that members should work on for a particular song. Currently, all of those kinds of messages are sent to the chapter via email by the music team administrator, **Terry Reynolds**.

In 2008, the Harmonizer Facebook page was created to help manage external communications with the public, quickly becoming one of the most popular chapter pages in the BHS. Its use of meaningful and newsworthy posts, and event pages and photo albums has made it the chapter’s best tool for outreach to patrons and prospective members.

The chapter’s YouTube page has become very popular for sharing videos of performances, shows, and contest appearances. Plus it has helped promote chapter show ticket sales.

The chapter’s innovation in the digital era of marketing earned a special award from the BHS for **Scipio Garling** in 2010, and later a BHS *Harmonizer* magazine article about our success in using technology.

Our music distribution is 100 percent paperless these days – members get their music via the ‘members-only’ section of the Groupanizer website. And members also indicate their attendance plans there. No more telephone-tree system as in the 1960s and 1970s to notify members of meeting plan changes or emergency messages – instead we use email or text messages.

Learning materials have evolved from cassette tapes to CDs to current systems via Groupanizer. **Skip Coburn** and others such as **Mike Wallen** made individual learning cassette tapes for each member as the chapter’s earliest use of technology for education. The chapter has been a long-time user of learning tracks for every new arrangement. Some of these are done in-house and others are purchased from other barbershoppers like Drew Wheaton and Tim Waurick.

In 2014, **Mike Kelly** was named to head up technology for musical efforts in the chapter as part of the chapter musical leadership team. Using donated funds, he upgraded the audio equipment allowing our smaller groups to perform with individual handheld microphones and the chorus to record its first CD in a decade. **Mike** helped use Skype to connect with a chapter coach or music

team member to speak to the chorus during a meeting night. Also, **Mike** has video recorded shows since 2009 for pertinent clips to be posted on the chapter's YouTube channel and currently serves as video archivist and video producer for videos such as for Singing Valentine ads or grant applications.

During 2020, the chorus holiday show, *Christmas Coast to Coast*, was a virtual show that included the Northwest Sound Chorus in Bellevue, WA. It was a free concert that was broadcast on the BHS YouTube Channel. **Mike** and **Joel Golden** were the key to the technology used to make the show happen.

Currently, the chapter music team has developed a well-organized system for members to submit self-recordings and the listeners have been well trained to evaluate them and give consistent responses.

COVID PANDEMIC ERA

A chapter-appointed COVID advisory committee was appointed in January 2021 to help chapter leadership make decisions as to masks, in-person or Zoom or hybrid gatherings; and helped establish procedures and policies plus communicate with members and their families. The team was headed by **Jason Lee** with **Randall Eliason, Chris Huber, Stan Quick, Frank Shipp, Steve White**, and then president **Bruce Roehm** followed by **Noah Van Gilder**. Some of these members actually work in the health science field. That committee was often asked to consult with BHS and Mid Atlantic District (M-AD) leaders.

March 10, 2020 was our last face-to-face chapter meeting at the Scottish Rite Temple after the government declared changes needed to be made for groups during the pandemic.

COVID took two of our members – **Brian Miller**, an early DC area resident to die from the virus, and **Bob Wachter**, a long-time barbershopper in the DC area.

We began to use Zoom for our chapter meetings on Tuesday nights and were having well over 60 attendees for the first few months. Attendance leveled off to about 50 as the virus continued to force us to meet virtually. The chapter board of directors also met via Zoom as did other chapter committees and the very active music team.

Over the months, we had many guests from throughout the world-wide barbershop community. We interviewed them; asked them to teach or coach; had them conduct warm ups; asked them to explain a judging category; or asked them to teach choreography. Several guest quartets visited the chapter including VINTAGE MIX, Dr. Tim Workman and the WORKMAN FAMILY SINGERS, and the TRAMACK FAMILY SINGERS.

Several chapter members, in addition to **Joe** and **Tony**, made presentations (we called them electives) during the year to include **Steve White, Rick Savage, Jack Pitzer, Adam Afifi, Chris Huber, Joel Golden, Noah Van Gilder, Bruce Roehm, Devin Gerzof, Jason Lee, Randall Eliason, Mike Edison, Ben Watsky, Mike Fasano, Mark Klostermeyer, Tessa Walker, John Sifuentes, Chuck Hunter, Ken Ives, and Rusty Orvik**.

Some examples of those electives include: "Understanding White Collar Crime," "Building

a Race Car,” “Collecting Barber Shop Bottles,” or “Star Wars the Expanded Universe!” The chapter’s history team did a couple electives sharing the recent collections of historical materials from members and former members.

One fun activity during each of the weekly Zoom meetings was the different discussion topics. We were automatically assigned to small groups of five or so where we checked in on each other and then offered our “two-cents” on the topic of the week. Then each small group reported to the whole chapter. Examples of the topics include: “your favorite Harmonizer memory;” “what’s your go-to barbershop music to listen to;” “what annoys you most;” “if the chapter was given a million dollars, what should we do with it;” or “describe an ideal rehearsal afterglow.”

During the months of virtual meetings, **Alan Wile** conducted 15 interviews of members who had filled out a Harmo Hero form for posting on Groupanizer.

The chapter joined 30 other choral groups in the DC area to raise monies for the Capital Area Food Bank that was so severely challenged during the COVID.

The following traditional important events for the chapter were cancelled for 2020: our Youth Harmony Festival; M-AD Prelims; Southern Division Contest; International Convention in Los Angeles; Fall M-AD Convention; Choral Fellowship in Alexandria; Harmony University in Nashville.

Early in 2021, there was some chance that the Harmonizers would sing at a Society convention, but that was cancelled, as were the spring division contests.

The first meeting of 2021 was January 12 and was a virtual meeting via Zoom.

The music leadership team tried a new software for guys to sing together, even though they were miles apart – Jamulus. The very first chapter quartet on Jamulus was **Devin Gerzof**, tenor; **Tony Colosimo**, lead; **Jacob Broude**, bari, and **Turner Arndt**, bass. During the following months a number of members managed to get signed on and we got to hear quartets sing our songs! Some singers also found out it was a great way to sing tags during this difficult time.

The Society midwinter convention was held virtually and it was fun. There was a Harmonizer room on the virtual campus and there were usually about 20 from the Harmo family on the campus in the avatar they had created. One major event during that convention was the “out of the BHS archives” rerun of a VAUDEVILLE performance.

In addition, **Alan Wile** continued his work at interviewing members who have completed the Harmo Hero form to be posted on the chapter’s website.

In February, when the board was installed, President **Stan Quick** presented some fun awards to replace the long-standing awards for 2020 that we traditionally presented to members (New Note Award, Dick Hall Spirit Award, Honor Award, Sparks Award, Newgard Award and the Harmonizer Memorial Award). The replacement awards (dubbed the “Covies”) included the Chatterbox Award – to **Samantha Whiteoak**; Stage Hand Award for best virtual background – to **Mike Edison** for his shark background; Note-y Professor for best elective presentation – to **Jason Lee** for his statistical analysis of the COVID-19 Pandemic; Accidental Award for most likely to sing while unmuted – to **Howard Nestlerode**; Inspector Gadget Award for the best at-

home set up to record – to **Tony Colosimo**; Quarter Rest Award for the most likely to fall asleep during the Zoom – to **Bob Mattes**; Nom de Zoom Award for the best screen name – to **Ben Watsky** for his many variations on Kyle which someone called him one week by mistake; the Director's Cut Award for most likely to be eating during the meeting – to **Mark Klostermeyer** with no question; Dos Equis for most interesting story during a Harmo Hero interview – to **Bob Rhome** for the great story of his career adventures; and Fatal Distraction for the most likely member to have a distraction in the background such as cats, birds or clanking kitchen ware – although **Terry Reynolds'** cats were a strong contender for this award, **Noah Van Gilder's** birds and their “speaking up” during the meetings were chosen as winner.

Also at the installation meeting, the board announced that **Chris Buechler** was named Secretary Emeritus. He has served just over 25 years as secretary. Also, the board presented emeritus status to **Martin Banks** for his work as chapter historian.

Joe continued his annual personal interview of every member and community board member. He also encouraged singers to participate as best or as much as they could in the Zoom environment.

Monthly “pulse” surveys were distributed electronically to keep track of how members were coping personally, and of how they were progressing musically, and if they have any ideas to add a spark to chapter life.

One special event for the chorus was preparing a virtual choir presentation of “Stars and Stripes Forever” in conjunction with the Masters of Harmony chorus and featured as part of the BHS virtual convention. It was offered for use by media during the 4th of July.

There were a few social events during the year held via Zoom such as a virtual beer tasting; and then later in the year an in-person Top Golf event. These events were organized by chapter membership director **Jacob Broude**.

The chapter began to get back to “something normal” in about February, 2022. The first time the chorus was back on the risers was February 15 at Scottish Rite Temple (SRT). We stood six-foot apart, sometimes we changed meeting rooms every half hour, or went outside to sing on the “riser-like-steps” at SRT. Mask wearing was continued for months as COVID numbers changed in the Metro Area. Eventually masks were optional for those who chose to wear them.

TRANSITION TO EXPAND THE CHAPTER

After the BHS change to endorse Everyone In Harmony (an expanded concept to include all singers), the Alexandria chapter developed a plan expand to a consortium with several ensembles, a unified board and an operations team. The groups will continue to meet at Scottish Rite Temple on Braddock Road in Alexandria.

In 2022, the first new ensemble, Metro Voices – a treble chorus, appeared on the chapter's holiday show. The first singers on that show were **Kirstin Pugh, Elizabeth Colosimo, Caitlin Towers, Alissa Fernandez, Tallulah Dropkin, Jeanne Hillinck, Sheryl Berlin, Alex Pierce, Heidi Krukowski, Cadence Flaherty** and **Ali Bonebrake Esquea**.

Tessa Walker served as interim director for the formative period of this new group. She had served as one of the Harmonizer lead section leaders. In 2023, **Maggie McAlexander** was named assistant director for this ensemble and **Samantha Tramack** will become director.

There is a plan to launch a seasonal youth chorus for students under 18 years of age in the fall of 2023 and to launch a seniors chorus in 2024.

HARMONIZER FAMILY

The chapter has always had fun events during the year such as singing with our fellow barbershoppers as part of a ‘dog days of summer’ gathering hosted by the Prince William County, VA chapter every August. From its earliest years the chorus did holiday caroling in Alexandria and especially at local hospitals. Some years we also sang at the hospital in July. Currently, we do a walk-around in Old Town Alexandria one night during the holiday season to sing at restaurants. We also have provided summer concerts for the City of Alexandria, and have sung the National Anthem for professional soccer, baseball and football games in DC stadiums. One time we did the half-time show for a Redskins game. Fun, fellowship, songs, laughter and All-American-Patriotism were the result of the inaugural Alexandria – Hershey BHS Softball Classic and Cookout in August, 2017.

The Harmonizer Heat Glow was started by **Bill Bennett** in the earliest years of the chapter. It got its name from the fact that the chorus sang at the City of Alexandria’s burning-of-the-greens (Christmas trees) and then there would be an afterglow at his home. The Heat Glow has continued over the years in other homes and includes the famous grog served by the Bennetts.

A chapter auxiliary started out as *The Harmonettes* in 1966 with **Lucile Rodda** as president. She was followed by **Linda Werner** and she was followed by **Ginger Jordan**. The group’s name was changed to *FRIENDS IN HARMONY* about 2004. Some of the recent leaders were **Sandy Stamps**, **Marty Smith** and **Peggy Wagner**. In 2016 the auxiliary did not regroup and the chapter decided to appoint a director of volunteers, **Robyn Murane**, to manage the many projects and service opportunities the auxiliary used to manage. That position was added to the operations team.

Until COVID, we would typically begin our year with the annual Presidents’ Award Banquet where we installed our new officers and board members for the chapter; and we presented our major recognition awards: the Harmonizer Memorial Award, Oz Newgard Memorial Award, Harmonizer Honor Award, Ibbianne and Wilbur Sparks Award, Dick Hall Spirit of Harmony Award, and the New Note of the Year Award. In 2022, we added the Sandy Stamps “Open Arms” Award. **Mick Stamps** was the first recipient.

Six members of the Alexandria Chapter have been named to the Barbershop Harmony Society Hall of Fame – **Dean Snyder**, **Wilbur Sparks**, **Bud Arberg**, **Darrel Flinn**, **Walter Latzko** and **Alan Lamson**. There have been 28 Harmonizers named to the Mid-Atlantic District Hall of Honor. **Joe Cerutti** was the last to be so honored in 2023.

CURRENT LEADERSHIP

The 2023 chapter board includes: President – **Noah Van Gilder**; Vice President and also a

community member at large, **Carolyn Griffin**; Board Secretary – **Cy Shuster**; Treasurer – **Terry Reynolds**; Chapter Members at Large – **Turner Arndt** and **Devin Gerzof**; and Community Board members at large – **John Greene** and **Dave Kohls**.

A larger team performs the operational work for the chapter. The “Ops Team” for 2023 is Executive Director, **Randall Eliason**; Music/Artistic Director, **Joe Cerutti, Jr.**; Finance Director AH Inc., **Carl Kauffmann**; Finance Director BHS, **Dave Welter**; Volunteers Director, **(Vacant)**; Communications Director, **Steve Murane**; Contest Director, **Craig Kujawa**; Education Director, **Sheryl Berlin**; Development Director, **Ken Rub**; Membership Director, **Jacob Broude**; Shows Director, **Doug White**; Operations Director, **Gary Cregan**; Historian, **Don Harrington**; and Chapter Secretary, **David DesPortes**. **Susan Fitzpatrick** is general manager.

FINALLY

Probably one of the best ways to describe what it means to be an Alexandria Harmonizer lies in the story behind the song, “A Place on the Risers for You.” **Bob Bates** wrote the words in 1981 based on the departure of bass section leader **Bill Cody** for a new military assignment. **John Hohl** wrote the music. **Bob** wrote that he thought “the song belonged to all Harmonizers who come together in friendship to raise their voices in song and have fun.” Whenever a man leaves or departs the area, we sing this song to him!

*“There will always be a place on the risers for you,
There will always be a place in our hearts for you too;
For the songs that we sang and the chords that we rang,
Have made you forever a part of our gang.”*

This brief and much consolidated Harmonizer history expands our chapter story following the details in our 50th anniversary book, *Breathless Moments* published in 1998-99 by an editorial team of **John Hanna**, **Wilbur Sparks**, and **Gary Smith** who was overall chairman for the publishing effort. The 50th anniversary book followed an important 35-year chapter history written by **Ted Fitch**, “Thru the Years with the Harmonizers.”

As always, “it is great to be a Harmonizer!”

Compiled by Jack Pitzer with Martin Banks Chris Buechler, Joe Cerutti, Randall Eliason, Mike Everard, Terry Jordan, Dixie Kennett, Terry Reynolds, Bob Sutton, Alan Wile, Steve White, Dean Rust and Steve Murane. Edited by Bruce Roehm. (Corrections welcome – send to Jack Pitzer- editorjack@aol.com)