**A History to Celebrate the Harmonizers’ 70th Year**

**Prepared *September 13, 2018***

**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 19, 1948. We are now part of the Barbershop Harmony Society (BHS), the new business name of the Society, headquartered in Nashville, TN and members 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 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**,** 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 chapter. Deanwas also quick to suggest toGenethat 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. They also arranged for the chapter to meet at the recreation center at 1605 Cameron Street.

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 in the area.

**MEMBERSHIP GROWTH**

Membership started with eighteen guys, the minimum number required to receive a Society charter document signed by Society founder **OC Cash**. The number grew fast and stayed at about 60 for many years until chapter leaders, led by **John Adams,** 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. We have had over 1,200 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, committee chairs in musical and administrative leadership. Six 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; and **Dennis Ritchey** the current M-AD president. **Wilbur Sparks** was Society president in 1970. **Darryl Flinn**, a Harmonizer coach 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. 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. These four men, plus prolific arranger, **Walter Latzko**, are our chapter members enshrined in the Barbershop Harmony Hall of Fame. **Alan Lamson**, was also a Society president in 2011 and 2012.

**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** – 1950-61; **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, Will Cox, Larry Deters, Chuck Hunte**r, **Mike Kelly, Craig Odell, 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 1970’s the chorus began to make its competitive mark, finally winning its first Southern Division contest in 1975, and first M-AD contest in 1978. Since then, the Harmonizers have won 26 M-AD championships, and earned 19 International medals, including four golds: 1986 in Salt Lake City, 1989 in Kansas City, 1995 in Miami Beach, and 998 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 Latzko,** 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. 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,** whojoined the chorus and was named choreographer in 2014. 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”: **Jim Casey**, **Greg Clancy, Don Claus, Tony DeRosa, Darryl Flinn, Jay Giallombardo, Brandon Guyton, Kevin Keller, Greg Lyne, Steve Plumb, Steve Scott, Steve Tramack, David Wright,** and **Kirk Young.**

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** and later **Chris Buechler, Scipio Garling, Chuck McKeever, Gary Plaag, Dean Rust, and Larry Silva.**

Chorus retreats have been a major training tool for the Harmonizer preparation for competition. All members attend, and we have 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 recent years to McDaniel College in Westminster, MD. **Chuck McKeever** has served as coordinator of a team to manage these retreats in recent years.

Each year we recognize the class of the year (all new men and any other men 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.

Musical arrangers have also helped us succeed in the contests and in our show production work such as **Jim Clancy, John Hohl, Rob Hopkins, Fred King, Walter Latzko, Greg Lyne, Steve Tramack, Ed Waesche, Scott Werner,** and **David Wright.**

**PERFORMANCES**

The Harmonizer’s good singing and excellent performance packages led to unique opportunities to showcase ourselves, 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** and an 80th birthday special for **Victor Borge**, and to help **Elizabeth Taylor** launch a new perfume.

No history is complete without mentioning 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,* 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.

**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 and our sell-out holiday dinner shows were held at First Baptist Church on King Street.

**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 nearly all follow-on shows for the next 25 years.

Popular productions and themed shows were the Toyland show, which we took on the road to many chapters in our district and to the M-AD convention; a fraternity house; a knights and dragons melodrama; pirates, westerns, magic acts, prisoners, WWI, clowns, and 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, were all well-received.

**Steve White** and **Gary Plaag** created the first Santa’s workshop shows, and in recent years **Scipio** **Garling** and **Josh Roots** wrote and produced the holiday shows with a jack-in-the-box (played by **Terry Reynolds**), toys and elves that were very popular dinner shows where chorus members were both waiters and singers. Santa and Mrs. Claus (aka **Bruce** and **Ginny Minnick**) were part of these shows too. **Brian Ammerman** was producer of our most recent holiday show which was back in T.C. Williams High School in their new auditorium.

Our 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 end caps we started using again in 2010 (to expand the risers into a curved formation to hold more singers) were a signature item for the Harmonizers in contests and formal shows beginning in 1998.

**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 WWII Memorial, and then joined 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 convention that was in Baltimore. It featured many top-ranked SAI and BHS quartets, plus the two local choruses and championship SAI chorus from Sweden, Ronnige Show Chorus. **Ken Fess** and **Mick Stamps** made this event happen.

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

For several summers we 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 other’s homes. More recently **Ken Rub** produced a show featuring ROCKAPELLA to help us attract a younger and diverse musical audience.

The chorus sang at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC, on Memorial Day in 1996; and several times, a small group of singers has entertained at the White House during the Christmas holidays. Also our quartets have appeared on the stage at the annual lighting of the National Christmas tree. Many times the chapter has sung for the Historical Society of the Supreme Court in their building – often with several justices present.

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 these were then donated to the BHS Museum.

**FUNDRAISING**

Many of these 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. Currently we sell White House Christmas ornaments with **Sandy Stamps** as honcho. **Skip Coburn, Roger Day,** and **Dave** **Reyno** have been three of the major volume salesmen of ornaments. In recent years we sold Entertainment books with **Chuck Harner** as honcho. Our scrip sales program has also become a growing source of income. **Craig Kujawa** has led this effort in recent years.

Also in April of 2018, thanks to past president **Randall Eliason**, the chapter earned over $35,000 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. 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.

We produced several LP albums 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.

Most recently we have had financially successful silent auctions at our shows – especially 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, Don Dillingham,** and **Saundra Deltac**.

Grants have also provided support for the chapter’s programs culminating in grant requests prepared by **Dean Rust** in 2018 to obtain arts grants for the chapter from the city of Alexandria and the state of Virginia. The Harmonizers have also received grants from BHS for outreach to youth and the community.

**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. 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 Griener**.

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 Koeln, Germany; and a barbershop show with our new friends of the Erster Koelner chorus who are members of Barbershop in Germany (BinG!).

**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 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 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. We also did a chorus meet-up with the Alfred Street men again along with the Alexandria Singers directed by **Bill Colosimo** and the Hispanic Choir from Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church.

In May 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.

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 – we were joined by a dozen men who auditioned to sing with us for 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 about 40 women who auditioned to sing with us formed the choir.

**QUARTETS**

The strong music program over the years yielded many quartets and some of them earned high marks in the international 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 in1976, 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**;** and **THROWBACK** with **Sean Devine** fourth place medalists in 2017.

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 headed mostly by **Bruce Lauther** who will sing any time or place and do so several times a year.

Over the years there have been many M-AD 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 Cazenas**, 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 Cazenas, Scott Disney, Mike Pinto, Steve White**

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

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

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

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

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

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, Mike 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**

Many of our chapter quartets have gone on to compete at International contests since 2012 including TOP SHELF, MADHATTERS, BSQ, DA CAPO, THROWBACK, LAST MEN STANDING, and MAYHEM.

We have also had some senior quartets earn high marks. One 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

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.

In 2017 **Bill Colosimo** represented the chapter in the first M-AD mixed quartet contest (with men and women) 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.

Our chapter launched CAPITAL FORCE – an 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. Several of our current chapter members have sung in CAPITAL FORCE.

The chapter holds its annual Youth Harmony Festival with a chorus of about 40 young men and 40 young women. **Brad Jones** has headed up this activity in recent 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.

TBD, our modern a cappella group, was formed in 2008 by **Tom Kraus** and **Scipio Garling**. Today **Reed Livergood** is their musical leader and the group appears with the chorus and makes appearances of their own all during the year.

**Ken Rub** helped launch our first Aca Challenge in 2014 to recognize local area a cappella groups. The successful event continues and has featured the chorus, our TBD a cappella group from within the chorus, and a contest for six groups from around the Northeast. The first place winner now receives a $2,000 prize. The panel of a cappella judges combines their choice with the electronic vote by the audience. Currently TBD coordinates the Aca Challenge.

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 2007-09.

Since 1966 when **Wilbur Sparks** proposed the first one, the chapter has had a fun “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 quartet based on adjudication by guest assigned as judges.

**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. The historical aspects of the old *Echo* are now published as a *Looking Back* blog each week by **Jack Pitzer**.

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, restaurateurs, arts benefactors, city staff members, arts council representatives, and other a cappella groups. 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**

The Harmonizers first website was created in 1996. Also during the ‘90s 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. In recent years, the electronic publication was produced weekly by **Steve White.** The current publisher is **Dave Branstetter**. 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.

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.

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.

Similar technology changes have developed in the vocal review process moving us from cassette tapes to digital devices. Also we added digital cameras to record stage presence and then distribute it to members for their self-review of their progress.

Our music distribution is about 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. **Skip Coburn** made individual learning cassette tapes for each member as the chapter’s earliest use of technology for education. Currently, **Chuck McKeever** records chorus rehearsals and coaching sessions and shares them with members for their personal review of their performance. In 2014,e HeIn 20143, In **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.

**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.

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* a few years ago. The most recent presidents were **Sandy Stamps** and **Christina Ammerman**. 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.

We began our 70th year with the 44th annual Presidents’ Award Banquet where we installed our new officers and board members for the chapter; and we presented our six 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.

**Shawn Tallant** was installed as president of the Alexandria Harmonizers BHS Chapter along with his boardofdirectors **Chris Buechler**, secretary; **Al Herman**, treasurer; **Dave Branstetter, Clyde Crusenberry** and **Matthew Doniger,** members at large; and **Randall Eliason**, immediate past president.

A larger team performs the operational work for the chapter: **Terry Reynolds**, executive director; **Joe Cerutti**, artistic director; **Steve Murane**, communications director; **Craig Kujawa**, contest director; **Johan Westberg**, development director; **Mike Edison**, operations director; **Dave Kohls**, membership director; **Joe Cerutti, Sr**., shows director;  **Robyn Murane**, volunteer activities director; education/outreach director, **Sheryl Berlin** **;** **Dave Welter,** BHS finance director;  **Carl Kauffmann** , AH, Inc. finance director**;** archivist/historian, *position open*.

The nine-member board of the chapter’s other 501(c)3 group which concentrates on fundraising, Alexandria Harmonizers, Inc., is headed by **Liz Birnbaum**; **Clyde Crusenberry**, vice president; **Bruce Roehm**, secretary; **Julie Rizzo**, treasurer; with **Bob Faherty,** **Pat Miller, Ken Fess, Shawn Tallant,** and **Randall Eliason.**

**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, and Steve White, Edited by Steve Murane.*  *(Corrections welcome – send to Jack Pitzer- editorjack@aol.com)*