



BQPA/PIONEERS

Recap of the BQPA/Pioneers Quartet Festival in Chicago 9/7-10/2011

Thanks to Gerry Carroll, Festival Chairman and his staff, The Barbershop Quartet Preservation Association (BQPA/Pioneers) chalked up another large success with their Chicago Area Fall Quartet Festival. Attendance was down a bit attributed to the current economy, however just under 100 singers enjoyed the festivities held on September 7-10, 2011.

The extended weekend begin on Wednesday, September 7th with about a dozen singers checking into the beautiful Best Western Conference & Convention Center, in Hillside IL, a suburb of Chicago near the O'Hare airport. This was the first time to hold our Quartet Festival at this facility and it certainly was a good decision to do so. The hotel was large and well equipped to handle our group. Our activities were essentially held in a banquet room more than adequate for our singing activities, including the Friday night pick up quartet contest and our parade of quartets show on Saturday night. Since this was our first time there, the hotel graciously provided everything we needed to assure us a good barbershop experience.

Bright and early on Thursday morning several guys were seen loading their golf clubs in their cars to head on over to a nearby golf course. This is a regular outing that is held at each one of our Quartet Festivals. Singing on every tee seemed more important when you made a par or a birdie. This same activity occurred on Friday morning as well.

By Thursday evening the attendance had swelled to around 30. Our banquet room was populated sufficiently to have 4-5 quartets singing most all of the evening. There was also a lot of fellowship being enjoyed. Shifting of singers within the quartets happened quite regularly. We had a few Sweet Adeline (SAI) gals as well as Harmony Incorporated (HI) there, also blending their voices with the guys. Many of our wives are singers and enjoy singing with the lower voices of the men. The hotel donated a keg of beer and soda for our evening's enjoyment. In fact the hotel provided beer and soda for the entire festival. Now that is real hospitality!

By early afternoon on Friday, many more singers had arrived. With the return of our golfers around noon, we probably had 45 singers, growing to about 60 registered members by early evening. I believe we also signed up 11 new members, bringing our total increase in membership for the 2011 year to 42. We are approaching the 300 member mark now. If memory serves me, there were also 11 quartets in the pick up quartet contest.

Tom Neal, our founder served as the MC for the contest and did a very admirable job. The winning quartet comprised of Jerry Steffen, "first time" lead singer, Richard Vormelloch, Rex Touslee and Bill Myers. They called them selves the "Inoculators" and did a pretty respectable job of singing. As it has often been said, we manage to produce some pretty good sounds!

Saturday morning brought us to the General Membership meeting. Emmett Bossing led the attendees in the singing of the Old Songs and a couple Barberpole Cats. It was pleasing to know that many of our members attended this meeting. There were several bits of discussion about our new and future festival venues. We had some general discussion on ways to increase our attendance and what we could do to encourage guys to join. Rex Touslee reported the plans for the Spring Festival in Tempe. Things are falling into place for a great time. Please visit www.bqpa.com for detailed information.

By Saturday afternoon we were at full strength for the weekend, just short of 100 singers. There were several there for attending the special memorial celebration of our good friend and fellow singer, "Lynn Hauldren" who passed away at the age of 89 few weeks ago. Lynn was active right up to the wire! Joyce Markle, Lynn's lady friend hosted this memorial. There were free beverages and finger food. There were several guys attending who had a close relationship with Lynn over the years. Many of the grass roots barber-shoppers knew Lynn as the bari of the Chordiac Arrest, also singing with the Chicago Natural Gas Quartet and several other notable quartets. Many thousands of folks knew Lynn as the "Empire Carpet Man." Lynn had taken on the moniker of the "Elder Bari" for his harmonet correspondence. A 25 minute DVD was shown at the Memorial featuring the Chicago Natural Gas Quartet. (CNG) It was quite entertaining. Ray Henders, tenor of the quartet made the comment that CNG had produced two CD's. The first was, "Chicago Natural Gas Cuts One" and the second was named, "A whiff of the Chicago Natural Gas." These guys would do most anything for a laugh, and they also sang well.

The Saturday night parade of Quartets (show) came off very nicely, thanks to our show chairman, Raymond Schwarzkopf. "Random Sample" hailing from the Twin Cities area started the show, doing a nice job of entertaining. This quartet was part of the 14 members that attended from the Twin Cities area. Second was a quartet from the Chicago area, "Mid Town Sound" who was quite entertaining. They had been together only a short

while but certainly knew what barbershop quartet singing was all about. Third in the line up was a SA quartet called. "Impact," Region 3, Silver medalist. They were on their way to competing in the Sweet Adeline International contest in Houston in a few weeks. They were quite good, with a lot of sparkle in their performance. Last but not least was the perennial group, "Gadzooks" who have performed for the BQPA/Pioneers shows for eleven years in a row. They have recently acquired a seasoned bass singer, Doug Smith who has raised their level of performance quite significantly. Doug serves as a coach as well as a singer. The show was over early leaving plenty of time for fellowship and more quartet singing. Within 5 minutes of the show ending several pick-up quartets had began to sing. It's what we do! ;-)

There were several who attended for the first time. Jim Foy, bass of the "Happiness Emporium", and currently singing with the 'Good News Quartet'. Mike Testa, dedicated quartet man, from the Atlanta area, and Dick Fass, baritone of the quartet named "Syncopates" who had placed 3rd in the 1953 SPEBSQSA International contest. Dick was active in the Pioneers back in the 80's so he rejoined under the current criteria. In total we had 11 new members join our organization. Sorry, don't remember all the names.

The singing was still going strong when I gave up around midnight. Planning is already underway for our 2012 Chicago Quartet Festival, pay close attention to the BQPA website www.bqpa.com for updates. Also plan to attend our western Quartet Festival in Tempe AZ in the spring of 2012. Updated information is already on the events page of the BQPA/Pioneers web site. Visit www.bqpa.com You will be glad you did!

I want to thank our BQPA staff of officers (the unsung heroes) for doing such a fine job in hosting another successful activity. You are the best!

Jack Martin, President
BQPA/Pioneers