

INSIDE: **Barbershopper** stars in #1 box office hit • **Membership Growth Task Force** • **Philly Convention**

November/December 2009

# THE HARMONIZER

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE BARBERS

A photograph of two men standing in a snowy environment. The man on the left is wearing a dark grey winter coat and a bright blue scarf. The man on the right is wearing a dark grey winter coat and a red scarf, and has glasses. Both men are smiling. The background is a soft-focus snow-covered field.

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## Features



**PARANORMAL PUBLICITY.** Micah Sloat, a member of Westminster Chorus, has been busy promoting "Paranormal Activity" with Katie Featherston, his co-star in the \$100 million fright movie sensation. He's had little time to sing lately, but has managed to fit in a few good words for four-part harmony along the way.

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## Thanks for your efforts in 2009—let's keep it up!

*"Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it."*

As the end of my first year as your president approaches, I'm moved to take stock a bit. We worked hard in 2009 to start the process of reversing our decades-old membership decline. And it's starting to work! Donations to Harmony Foundation in support of our outreach and chapter support programs are up. Recruitment is up. Many chapters have examined what they do every week and made changes for the better. For that—on behalf of a grateful Society and the men who will follow us here—I thank you!

But of course, as Karen Carpenter sang, "We've only just begun." As I've said in these pages before, we didn't get into this situation overnight, and we're not going to start to grow again—real, sustained growth—overnight either. More of us need to join Harmony Foundation's great programs in support of our future. Go to [www.harmonyfoundation.org](http://www.harmonyfoundation.org) and click on "Donate Now" at the top of the page. Or call 866-



**While recruiting is up, while donations are up, while many chapters have made changes for the better, we need to do more.**

706-8021 and ask how to get involved. We have some great, new programs to help our chapters grow—and to attract even more young people to our hobby—but we can't put them into place without more financial help from barbershoppers and barbershop supporters who care enough to get involved. Who care enough to back their passion for this hobby with their money.

**Recruiting's best motives**

While recruiting is up this year, it's not up enough. We—all of us—need to do more. If we are going to reverse this deadly downward spiral, we need to introduce even more men to the life enriching music and fraternity we share. If you're like me, you've been

thinking of inviting that neighbor, relative, co-worker, fellow church member to a meeting, but you just haven't gotten around to it. Let's make a pact. I'll do it if you will! Okay? After all, you're not really doing it for you, your chapter, or even your Society. You're doing it for him—for the prospect! Has your life been changed by this hobby? Shouldn't he have that opportunity, too?

And, as we all know, recruiting isn't enough. We need to retain more men. Bringing them in is only the first part of the equation. Keeping them is the other. And—again, we all know this—what happens every week at your chapter meeting is what brings them

back. We love to sing. Let's show it more. We love each other. Let's show it more. We love to have fun. Let's have more of it. If you'll become the "energy" guy at your meeting, I'll do it, too. If you'll decide to greet each man warmly each week, so will I. If you'll smile more and complain less, I will, too! If you'll gently—lovingly—encourage your chapter leaders to add more variety to your meetings, to allow a little more laughter in, I will, too! Let's agree to make even more of a difference in 2010! Okay?

At the top of the page is a quotation from a lead singer named Goethe. (He must have been a lead singer; he was a man of action!) Action—bold action—does have genius in it.

Let's begin anew in 2010. Let's be bold. Let's create magic. Let's make 2010 the year we—you and I—turn this thing around, guaranteeing the future of this organization that has so enriched our lives. Let's put both oars in the water and row together toward that distant shore.

Toward the same goal: Assuring that this organization we love so much will survive us on this earth.

Will you join me and thousands of others in this crucial effort? Together we can grow again. In Harmony.

I'm at [bbiffle@barbershop.org](mailto:bbiffle@barbershop.org) for another year.

[bbiffle@barbershop.org](mailto:bbiffle@barbershop.org)



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## Where to start: Chapters Helping Chapters

Many of you know that 2009 was the “Year of the Chapter,” and the slogan we used was “It’s your Chapter...”—implying that the solution to chapter problems was in your hands. There were sporadic and scattered inputs from around the Society that showed some people understood what we were trying to encourage, but for many it was simply business as usual. The entry point for new members, and the exit point for former members, is the chapter. While new chapters form and others grow and thrive, the Society continues to lose members faster than it gains new ones. There are many chapters struggling to succeed, or even to have four parts at each meeting.

So, we have decided to carry the “Year of the Chapter” theme forward, but the 2010 slogan I want to use is “Chapters Helping Chapters.” We hope that each and every chapter around the Society will look to strengthen itself, to have more fun, to be more vigorous, and to engage at every level of competition, singing, performing, tagging, community involvement, and all those things that make barbershopping the most enriching and rewarding of pastimes. How?



### You can seek help

**Help with shows:** Use the Standing Ovation Program, the scripts available in the Harmony Marketplace and at Harmony University, the coaching available from all manner of coaches and judges, and advice for your show from other chapters who have put on successful shows. Ask around, e-mail the Harmonet, talk to your District leaders. *Chapters Helping Chapters.*

**Help with competition:** Use the Music Mentor Program, the Chorus Director Workshop Intensive (CDWI) program, the Chorus Director Development (CDD) committee, help from coaches and judges, and advice for your competitive package from other chapters who have been successful in competition.

*Chapters Helping Chapters.*

**Help with making meetings more fun.** Use Society resources at [www.barbershop.org](http://www.barbershop.org), ideas delivered at Leadership Academies, ideas from our Society Chapter Support and Leadership Training (CSLT) committee, from manuals, from other chapters who have more fun at their meetings. *Chapters Helping Chapters.*

**Help with your community involvement.** Start with the Singing For Life program, an easy and very effective way to help others less fortunate—already organized for your chapter to get involved. Ask Harmony Foundation for information on various charitable giving avenues they have available, including their

Donor Choice program that can help your chapter with funds! Find out, through communication, what other chapters in your area are doing to perform, to give, and to educate. *Chapters Helping Chapters.*

**Help with Youth In Harmony.** Contact our Youth In Harmony committee (includes all the YiH reps in each district), and ask what you can do on a community, a district, and even an International level to encourage barbershop in our schools and to our younger generations. I guarantee that the most jaded, curmudgeonly, crabby, ghastly old Grinch will be affected when he sees a quartet of teens singing “Kentucky Babe.” It brings tears to my eyes just thinking about it. Ask “Montana Jack” Fitzpatrick. And ask the chapters that have put on YiH Harmony Explosion camps or sent a youth chorus to Midwinter and the Youth Chorus Festival how they did it and what it was like. *Chapters Helping Chapters.*

I know, some of you are thinking that other chapters won’t help you, that you’re the competition. Or you’re thinking, “We’re out here in the boonies, there aren’t any chapters around to help.” *Wrong!* Hear of the Internet? Cell phones, Facebook, Twitter? When the Beatrice, Neb. chapter won the 2006 “You Can Sing Too” award, were they any closer to another chapter than you are? Unlikely! But the **St. Joseph, Mo. chapter** was watching over them as they did it. I was kept up to date by then-Central States District President Byron Myers.

Ask **Westminster** where they would be without the help of the **Masters of Harmony**. Ask the chapters near **The Vocal Majority** if they aren’t helpful, gracious and help others be successful. Get help from **Sound of the Rockies**, ask the Evergreen District and the **San Antonio Chapter** ... the list goes on.

You can, and may, always drop me an e-mail if you don’t know where to turn. Sometimes the help you need is just a nudge in the right direction to get information. I am here to serve you, not to do it for you, but to help you do it for yourself. But before it gets to me, try your local chapters or your district leadership. They will also be a valuable resource. Try [www.barbershop.org](http://www.barbershop.org) and other Internet resources. And then take the advice or not, but do something or get out of the way, because there are others who will. And we must succeed.

To all Society members, how am I doing?

[ewatson@barbershop.org](mailto:ewatson@barbershop.org)

2009’s “Year of the Chapter” focus will continue on in 2010 as “Chapters Helping Chapters.”





# Barbershopper stars in #1 box office fright movie

Micah Sloat promotes barbershop harmony while promoting *Paranormal Activity*

**W**anted: male actor to star in low-budget, improvised film. Must be willing to work late nights without knowing what next scene will entail—no script has been created.

Micah Sloat answered that L.A.-area Craigslist advertisement in 2006. He beat 150 other aspiring actors for the co-starring role by the way he immediately slipped into character in response to first-time director Oren Peli's opening question: "Tell me why you think your house is haunted." After seven days as co-star and cameraman, filming improvised dialog inside the director's own house, Sloat collected his \$500 paycheck for the ultra-low budget production. He returned to his computer programming day job, hoped *Paranormal Activity* would lead to something, and continued to audition for other roles. In 2008, he discovered barbershop and some really cool new friends in the **Westminster Chorus**, while he continued to work for a big break as an actor or musician.

Would "The #1 Movie in America" be considered a big break? After great reaction at horror film festivals, a copy of *Paranormal Activity* made its way into a big-studio producer's hands. Paramount Pictures picked up the movie, a new ending was filmed, and some of Sloat's original songs were added to the movie sound track. Through brilliant marketing and great word-of-mouth, the thriller exploded with a huge October opening weekend, and the \$11,000 movie made more than \$100 million domestically. Westport, Conn. native Sloat and his co-star Katie Featherston soon found themselves working full time to promote the movie, appearing on magazine covers and as guests on the talk-show circuit. The movie is now widely available on DVD and BluRay.

The R-rated thriller focuses on a young couple—the characters are also named "Micah" and "Katie"—who

recently moved into their first home. Katie is disturbed by nighttime events that remind her of haunting childhood experiences. Micah at first refuses to take these events seriously, but leaves his video camera running at night to capture what is happening while they sleep. (The entire film is recorded from his camera's perspec-



Micah Sloat with co-star Katie Featherston

He also sings in a barbershop choir, which he promises isn't as dorky as it sounds. "Someone who has no musical background might see it as overly zealous men singing in harmony," he laughs. "But I get really into it. I'm bringing it back. Justin Timberlake can have sexy, I'll have barbershop."

—Entertainment Weekly

.) Increasingly unsettling events captured on video prompt them to call in a medium, who is of little help but who offers ominous details regarding spirits and demons. Tension builds to unbearable levels as the couple desperately tries to make sense of the increasingly disturbing and violent events they experience or discover while reviewing video. Critics have applauded the actors' convincing performances and Peli's masterful use of minimalism to build forboding and dread while delivering many truly frightening moments.

Micah attended Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, N.Y., where he was involved in theater and ran the campus TV station. He graduated from the Musicians Institute in Hollywood, where he was studying acting when the *Paranormal Activity* role came available. He's been too busy promoting the movie to attend Westminster rehearsals lately, but he hasn't hesitated to promote barbershop harmony in the media as a great outlet for hip, good-looking young guys like himself. We couldn't agree more, Micah! Let's hope this is only the beginning of a long, successful career, both in movies and in four-part harmony!

# Task force outlines member growth objectives

In May 2009, Society President Bill Biffle announced the appointment of the Membership Growth Task Force (MGTF) to create an overall strategy to achieve sustained growth of the organization. Their charges pertaining to membership growth included:

- Survey affecting societal and cultural changes
- Review barriers to growth and recommend strategies for the elimination of these barriers
- Survey past Society growth strategies
- Survey the challenges of individual chapters
- Recommend programs and policies showing high likelihood to achieve sustained growth
- Recommend changes to existing programs and policies necessary to achieve sustained growth
- Recommend changes in current staff resources and alignments, if necessary, to sustain growth
- Suggest measurements, goals, and milestones for assessing progress and success in sustaining growth
- Estimate budgetary requirements of proposed policies and programs and suggest possible revenue streams

Biffle and the MGTF later agreed that some of the above charges must first be addressed at a strategic level, which would establish the broadest objectives and the ability to address multiple issues simultaneously. In their first report to the Society Board of Directors in November, 2009, the MGTF recommended the following:

1. The overall strategic plan for increasing membership in the Barbershop Harmony Society must be based on helping chapters become successful, in whatever way they choose to enjoy barbershop harmony, in providing a consistent, high-quality experience each and every week.
2. The Society should implement a plan that would systematically provide direct support to all chapters desiring support, rather than promoting a Society-wide membership program or drive.
3. The Society should implement a plan for providing the strongest possible support mechanisms for individual chapters. A systematic review should be conducted of how this best could be achieved either within the current district configuration or by creating new subdivisions or districts.
4. The Society should develop a strategic plan for developing new chapters.
5. The Society should develop specific plans for how to appeal to and attract members of all ages, and how to serve them better to increase retention.
6. The Society should implement a clear strategy for an external focus.
7. The Society should examine whether changes to the contest system might enhance growth.

Read the full report at [www.barbershop.org/mgtf](http://www.barbershop.org/mgtf). ■

## New task forces to examine/develop strategies for four aspects of growth

President Bill Biffle's first formal reaction to the above report came in December, 2009, when he created four task forces to address the following:

### **Develop an effective, sustainable delivery method to systematically and consistently provide support to all chapters that desire support.**

- Review the most effective ways to integrate of staff, Society committees, district leadership teams, and chapters in this process.
- Assess the effectiveness and value of existing programs, including their elements and characteristics that allow them to be effectively delivered and supported.
- Explore new programs, systems, and methods of delivering effective help to chapters.

Task force: Alan Lamson (chair), John Donehower, Ben Geesa, Steve Morris, Paul Wietlisbach

### **Develop a strategic plan to create new chapters, including:**

- How to determine potential new chapter sites

- What minimum requirements are needed to ensure a new chapter will have a reasonable chance to be successful
- Methods to provide continuing support particular to new chapters

Task force: Alan Wile (chair), Drew Ellis, Ev Nau, Rick Spencer

### **Develop strategies to attract and retain members of all ages and exploring elements of chapter programming that will appeal to:**

- Identifiable age groups:
  - Late career/retired—born before 1946
  - Baby Boomers—born 1946-1964
  - Generation X—born 1965-1977
  - Generation Y—born 1978-1990
  - Millennials—born after 1991

Task force: Shannon Elswick (chair), John "Montana Jack" Fitzpatrick, Casey Parsons, James Estes

### **Develop a strategy for effective external focus, including:**

- A marketing strategy to enhance the overall reputation of barbershop harmony and the Barbershop Harmony Society in the outside world
- Development of ideas for providing services and products to other music organizations
- A plan for creating and supporting sub-groups within the Barbershop Harmony Society to encourage non-traditional barbershop singing:
  - A cappella
  - Gospel
  - Mixed-group
  - College-aged barbershop quartets
  - High school-aged barbershop quartets
  - Others
- Coordinate with the Society Board Task Force on Affiliates to develop a plan to encourage and facilitate their involvement, and possible integration, with the Society

Task force: Gary Parker (chair), Roger Lewis, Tom Metzger, Rick Spencer

# Power principles

“Decide what kind of chapter you want to be, then make a plan to get there.” It’s basic enough to overlook—and more essential than you can imagine

The Great Northern Union’s successful formula had become too routine, and member excitement and numbers were sagging. Pete Benson and Marty Monson envisioned a chapter future as bright as its past. Learn how the chapter reinvented itself to become better than ever

Many barbershoppers would give their left arm to have the challenges the **Hilltop, Minnesota Chapter** faced in 2006. (“Oh no! We dropped to eighth at international with our A-list director and only 66 guys on the risers! Whatever will we do?”) Get past the chapter’s historically high performance level—you just might relate to their predicament and learn from their way out.

The **Great Northern Union** chorus was smaller and older than they used to be, and generally getting a little smaller and older every year. On the surface, the chapter was providing the same quality experience it always had, but old-timers sensed that the mood had changed. For lack of a better term, the chapter was gradually losing its “mojo.” The formula that had once motivated chapter members and attracted new men was no longer delivering the same sense of purpose and momentum. The last thing they needed was the perception that the chapter’s best days were all behind them.

## A winning formula had lost its sizzle

Past chapter leaders had known exactly what kind

of chapter they wanted. The Great Northern Union was designed as a competitive chapter from its 1985 inception, and they soon made a big splash on Society stages with their youthful energy. Under the baton of Dean Haagenson and Roger Williams, the chorus competed at every international contest between 1987 and 2002, never placing lower than ninth and earning six international medals. Despite widely fluctuating membership numbers, the competitive formula appeared to work well.

Pete Benson took over as director in 2003 and added four more top-10 finishes, including an additional medal in 2005. By the 2006 contest cycle, Benson and then-chapter president Marty Monson sensed that the chapter’s competitive brand had been delivering diminishing returns for quite some time. “After 20 years, it had lost its sizzle,” Monson said. “It was same old, same old ... We’d go every year, finish in the seventh to fourth ranking ... what difference does it make?”

It wasn’t that chorus members suddenly disliked competition—in fact, nothing unified members better

LORIN MAY





**CHAPTER BOARD MORE THAN DIRECTOR'S BATON.** In 2006, Pete Benson led 66 Great Northern Union singers to an eighth-place international finish and a 87% score. The chapter skipped the next two contests then returned in 2009 with 86 men, a strong third-place finish, and a chapter record 92% score. Benson traces the competitive leap to administrative victories: A complete three-year overhaul of the chapter's mission and annual format that has put the sizzle back in chapter life, week after week.

Anaheim was one of only five high-pressure competitive events for which the chorus had prepared during the prior 12 months. Hilltop, Minn. chapter members now compete year-round—to be one of the best and best known vocal groups in their own back yard.

or motivated improvement more than preparing for a contest. There simply weren't enough competitions to go around. Weekly attendance would often sharply decline after contests, only to build back up during the next competitive cycle. "Two-song syndrome" had crept into chapter culture. The once-winning formula had become a repetitive habit, which in turn dampened their competitive edge. And then there was the state of their own back yard.

"We were better known outside the Twin Cities than within them," said Benson. Unless you happened to be on the chapter's mailing list for annual shows, GNU was a Minneapolis/St. Paul best-kept secret. Younger singers, especially, rarely heard them at all. Benson and Monson suspected that the waning competitive spirit and the chapter's default inward focus were two sides of the same coin.

#### **A vision of what they could become**

The chapter's "competitive" definition now appeared too narrow to satisfy even the most hard-core among

them. Pete and Marty believed change would be welcome ... but change to what? What would a "community focus" look like? What alternative to the current reality could capture the imagination of men who loved to set high competitive goals and stretch to achieve them? Where would they find new audiences? More youth? How would they grow in the future? How would they pay for all this?

**They started with a realistic view of what they already had:**

- A high-quality musical product
- Their director was a skilled music educator who has experience in various musical forms
- A history of unity when tackling competitive challenges
- Membership more or less ready for positive change
- Strong leadership and members with various talents

**They also looked at their challenges:**

- Limited recognition in a community with many popular vocal groups



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**“We were better known outside the Twin Cities than within them.” Unless you happened to be on the chapter’s mailing list for annual shows, GNU was a Minneapolis/St. Paul best-kept secret.**

- A static, aging local fan base
- Time and money limitations
- Chapter members who were too competitive to embrace a local focus if it came at the expense of contest success and/or Society mystique
- Two-song syndrome—their contest sets were stronger than the rest of their repertoire

**Aiming high, then planning the path there**

Pete and Marty went back and forth for a couple of months as they tried to envision a chapter format that would capitalize on their strengths and mitigate their challenges. They developed a vision of what they could become and wrote some goals:

- Be the best chorus in their own back yard
- Be viewed as a top arts organization by other area arts organizations and patrons

- Work with other organizations, make their fans into fans of barbershop and GNU
- Move from hosting one annual chapter show to hosting four major collaborative concerts each year

- Connect with area youth
- Learn 10 new songs each year while maintaining current repertoire (since revised to eight songs)
- Get greater exposure in the community, take better care of potential members, and increase active chapter membership to 100 (about a dozen men to go)
- Make more money through development programs and profit-making concerts
- Make Society competitions more alluring to chapter members
- Apply the competitive spirit to every concert so they

**Share audiences, but always present the art form at its very best**

Since changing their concert series to include four annual concerts featuring other popular groups, GNU has collaborated with 23 ensembles featuring more than a thousand singers. For most of those singers and their imported fans, it is a great first exposure to barbershop harmony. The sound, the choreography and the faces that most barbershoppers take for granted often take these groups and their fans by surprise.

GNU members view each of these first impression opportunities as a competition—competing to win over performers and audiences. “The more performing we do in those elements, the more we need to be on top of our game—to realize that we’re preparing ourselves to respectfully represent our art form,” said Benson.

“Honor barbershop harmony, and expect it to be respected,” he advises other Society groups. “But be very good at what you do in your own backyard. Even if it’s the high school choir, or maybe a VLQ or a quartet on stage, we’ve got to make sure we’re on [the visiting groups’] level. Why would you want to do anything less?”

**Right: Sharing audiences with the locally famous Twin Cities Community Gospel Choir and with famed singer/director Robert Robinson (seated) and 4Given gospel quartet.**





# After the vision: Share the workload—and especially share the recognition

Pete and Marty believe that their initial vision couldn't have been formed by a committee—great ideas rarely gain momentum when too many opinions come together too early. But it took a committee of leaders to catch their initial vision and run with it, sell it to the membership, and turn general ideas into specific realities.

Because Pete and Marty chose to lead by persuasion—rather than impose their vision by virtue of their respective leadership positions—they were able to depend on rather than compete with the leadership and ideas of others. They learned several lessons along the way.



**A quality chapter experience requires vision, planning and coordination. Behind-the-scenes workers deserve ample support and frequent recognition.**

been a key player from the beginning. Shared responsibility and succession planning were key to ensuring that ideas could be bigger than one leader or one term.

**Give behind-the-scenes workers due credit and prestige.** Chapter leadership has worked hard to infuse a mystique into vital board and committee roles. They work hard to ensure there are plenty of meaningful roles to go around, and that less visible contributions are regularly showcased and honored.

**Encourage informal leadership roles.** Not every important contribution requires a job title.

For example, chapter member Daryl Mortek, a professional videographer, created an emotionally stirring recap of the chapter's run-up to the Anaheim competition—a big boost to chapter mystique and cohesion.

**Develop a strong and growing core of leaders.**

Current chapter president Tom Semple was already fully invested in the vision and details when Monson's term ended one year into the three-year plan—he'd

- would be sharper for Society contests
- Increase their buzz in the community and within the Society

They knew they couldn't expect board or member buy-in unless their goals included a realistic map to bridge the distance between dreams and present realities. They developed a three-year plan that addressed five mutually-reinforcing elements: *money*, *music*, *marketing*, *membership* and *mystique*. Then they went into full persuasion mode—Power Point presentations, and they thought through every question they'd likely encounter. Board backing would be vital before they could try to sell members on the plan: It would be no small thing to ask members to sit out from international competition until the 2009 cycle while they learned to turn their competitive drive toward their own back yard.

## **MONEY—big ideas are not cheap**

For 20 years, the chapter had spent most of its \$50,000 annual budget on competitions. The chapter's new ambitions needed to be paired with higher financial resources—more

like \$100,000 a year. Money was such a key element to the success of all chapter goals that Monson immediately moved into a development role upon vacating the chapter president role.

The chapter has actually spent little time pursuing grants. They've spent more time ensuring that they invest funds well enough to turn each of their four annual concerts into a money-maker, generating more revenue to do things the chapter had never done before.

"We have surpassed the 'hobby' chorus title and elevated ourselves into the professional level of arts organizations," boasted chapter production manager Wally Brink after the chapter's recent three-day concert tour, paid entirely by chapter funds. "It puts the GNU in an elite class of arts organizations that are able to financially and organizationally pull this type of tour off."

## **MUSIC—their reason for existence**

The chapter's competitive spirit always had less to do with scores than with the reward of preparing songs for a live audience to a level near perfection. With four major annual concerts in addition to Society com-



**"Chorus directors—even professional music educators like Pete Benson—need significant support from other chapter leaders so they can focus primarily on directing and artistic results."**  
— Marty Monson



**CONNECTING WITH YOUTH.** The chapter will soon host its seventh annual Collegiate Concert. Young singers get ample musical and social exposure to GNU musical leadership and chapter members, who ensure youth are exposed only to quality barbershop. (For example, Men in Black quartet was a past visiting performer and clinician.)

The chapter honors this vital Youth in Harmony principle: That they are there to expose singers and educators to the power of our art form for the music's sake alone, and never as an overture to recruiting. (Nevertheless, exposure to quality barbershop has inspired some of these young singers to form quartets, and several young singers have joined the chapter on their own.)

A high quality barbershop product and lack of a hidden agenda has reassured and inspired many prominent music educators from among the Midwest's most elite vocal programs. Many of their groups now incorporate barbershop arrangements and performance styles into their concert repertoire.

More than a dozen Midwest collegiate male choruses have expressed interest in attending the 2010 concert. "We are getting the indication that we've started a trend and expectation within our own community," says Monson, "which is what we set out to achieve."



petition, chapter members now feel that satisfaction far more often.

"It's established a renewed confidence level," Monson said. "The chorus is more consistent with its performing levels from concert to concert."

"That's the goal, every performance is just as important as the other," Benson added. "The same chorus shows up for everything. It's fun to go out there and sing when you've been on top of your game all year."

### MARKETING—built into the calendar

Marketing isn't something the chapter starts on after it's schedule is set—the collaborative Concert Series is an external marketing strategy at its core. GNU started adding a lot of new names to their mailing lists and has had a lot more to discuss with local media since they started inviting other popular local groups—and therefore their fans—to perform in their Concert Series. It's easier to sell their own tickets when a well-known name is helping headline the show, and new audience

## If a chapter does nothing else, it must ...

In September, we asked *barbershopHQ.com* readers to complete the above sentence, thereby telling Society and chapter leaders where to put their main focus. The following is a small sample of more than 90 insightful answers, many of which parallel GNU's own conclusions. (Full comments can be found at *barbershopHQ.com/?p=1083*. All comments represent their authors' views only.)

**... engage the next generation of singers in barbershop quartet singing.** It's about survival. We need to engage (not just expose) the next generation of male singers currently in high school and college to barbershop

quartet singing. It needs to be attractive to them so they can justify their time to the pursuit. Making our chapters attractive and engaging to them may potentially increase engagement among current members. (*Matthew Cherry*)

**... strive to engage new audiences at every opportunity.** In my own chapter, there are so many opportunities we are not taking—a local orchestra we could help, local professional groups we aren't inviting to our shows or asking if we can sing for them, city events we could sponsor. We must perform more. We have to get the chapters out there as often as we can, or at the very least the chapter

quartets. If we want our hobby to grow, we must be bold and do things we would not normally do. Our best form of advertising our hobby is by utilizing our hobby. (*Jeff R.*)

**... obtain an effective music director.** ALL of our successful chapters have one. I am aware of the excellent efforts of headquarters to address this through Directors College, and CDWIs, but I feel a priority should be a Society program to help chapters find effective music directors through their association with ACDA, MENC, and local educators, with special training and possibly with financial incentives through Harmony Foundation. With an effective



**"If I'm in front of the chapter for more than an hour, eyes start to glaze over," Benson said. A variety of warm-up leaders, visual specialists, section leaders and others regularly take their share of riser time during chorus rehearsals. Benson acknowledges it is difficult for directors to trust others to use their time in front effectively. But sharing the musical workload does more than develop other musical leaders—it's improving the chorus.**

**"It makes my time in front of the chorus that much more important," Benson said. "The more I work myself out of a job, the better we get."**

members frequently show up as well.

Benson emphasizes that whenever a barbershop chorus shares audiences with another group, it's only a good marketing opportunity when the barbershop groups on the show compare favorably with the guest group. "The audience is going to build on negative stereotypes if the music isn't great," he said. He believes a quality barbershop chorus or invited quartet can do much to reset the public's perception of barbershop harmony.

### **MEMBERSHIP—growth, but no silver bullets**

The 25 men added to chapter rolls in the past three years tells only half the story. When the chorus was putting 66 men on the international stage a few years back, that was "competition size"—the functional size throughout the year was significantly smaller. Competitive shows every three months have mostly eliminated the incentive for a post-contest drop-off. But GNU's growth has been difficult to tie to any particular chapter membership growth initiative. New members come from a variety of places: Friends of members, a few of Pete's high school students, men who discovered them on the Internet.

"We don't have a silver bullet," Monson said, contrasting Hilltop's more organic results with the formal growth initiatives that have worked in other chapters. But he said that a dynamic membership VP ensures



**Chapter leaders direct members in their typical high-energy callisthenic warm up at the beginning of rehearsal**

chapter members offer guests a positive experience and that guests go through a smooth transition from first contact all the way through new member orientation. "We don't want to leave much up to chance," Monson added. "Membership growth is part of our planning."

### **MYSTIQUE—conscious development of internal and external "chapter buzz"**

What do members tell others about the chapter when no one else is listening? What either excites and motivates them or turns them off? What do their audiences tell others about the chorus? What about their Society peers? Internal and external mystique are closely related—few things excite chapter members more than hearing positive buzz about themselves coming back through the grapevine.

Benson emphasizes that mystique cannot be left to chance. "Manipulation" may be the wrong term, with its connotations of cynicism and insincerity; however, Benson declares that chapter leaders must plant the seeds of positive buzz at every opportunity.

music director, musical growth fraternity and personal fulfillment will follow. *(Jim Moore)*

**... do whatever is necessary to sing the [scoring] equivalent of a 60 or better.** And until they reach that goal, they don't sing in public. *(Allan Webb)*

**... conduct chapter meetings that always include multiple facets of fun.**

When it comes to scratching one's itch at chapter meetings, everyone's "itch factor" is different. *(Dave Cowin)*

**... find clarity among its members about what kind of chapter they want to be.** Some guys want to serve the community, others want to compete, others just want to hang out together. Whatever it is, define and live it. It's REALLY hard to be all things to all people. *(Kevin Kelly)*

**... make itself into a "Learning Organization."** Such a chapter is capable of determining the needs of its

members, prioritizing those needs, creating action plans to meet those needs, measuring progress and adjusting plans based on that feedback. Giving chapters the tools to become learning organizations is why creating the Education Department was so important. *(Bruce Smith)*

**... be known in the community.** It must market and advertise itself to the community as a fun hobby, a recreation, and a valuable member of the performing arts. Men with the predisposition to get involved in a singing group cannot do it if the opportunity does not present itself on a constant basis. *(George Doyle)*

**... encourage and promote a sense of volunteerism.** When the work load falls on a few of leaders of the chapter, they soon begin to burn out. The vitality of a chapter depends on sharing the workload and not leaving it for "someone else to do." When the work is shared, many of the small details that make a chapter meeting better will

begin to happen. That, in turn, will tend to draw the interest and enthusiasm of the older members as well as the newer. *(Brian Gordon)*

**... find clarity among its members about what kind of chapter they want to be.** Follow Kevin Kelly's advice. I see many chapters that are rudderless because they have too many rudders (if that makes any sense). The most successful chapters don't fit one mold, but the ones that clearly KNOW who they are and who they serve seem to have the best success rate at whatever they choose to do. *(Alan Gordon)*

**... work together.** Many small chapters simply do not have the resources to solve their problems, while many larger chapters have resources to spare. All chapters must realize that they all have strengths that they could share with others, and that when they struggle and need help, there is a huge barbershop world out there. There is no single answer to what a chapter must do to become stron-



# Deal makers, deal breakers: Successful chapters fill universal emotional needs

Consciously or not, GNU in large measure exemplifies principles taught by chapter leadership coach Chuck Greene. (Learn more about Chuck's "Compellingly Attractive Chapter Meetings" workshops at [www.21stn7th.com](http://www.21stn7th.com).) Chuck says wide research proves that most if not all of the following attributes can be found in successful and growing fraternal/member-ship organizations:

## Members are

- appreciated, sought for talents\*
- approached about their needs
- given a high, efficient return on their investment of time, energy and resources\*
- Welcoming to diversity in membership

## Members receive opportunities in

- Creativity—participation in "imagineering" new or improved results\*
- Participative leadership—power

to influence the pace, content and direction of the organization's life\*

- Skill, talent and knowledge growth\*
- Social circle development

## The organization has

- Astute and trustworthy managers with leaders and succession\*
- Upbeat ambiance—interwoven fun, humor and positive attitudes\*
- A Value-driven mission—the opportunity to transform society
- Variety
- Visual appeal

## \*Blue text=Deal Maker/Deal Breaker.

Deal makers are particularly potent in attracting and retaining members. Conversely, if even one of the Deal Makers is missing, it becomes a Deal Breaker, and people will likely fail to join or remain with that organization.

"We've adopted a very celebratory atmosphere," he said. "Finding leaders in the chorus and appreciating them gets everyone else pumped up and coming back for more. Recognizing new members, first-time competitors, celebrating well the collegiate concerts—we ride them, it helps them succeed. It's always, 'Let's get better. Look at what you've done.'"

External mystique can be influenced as well. After sitting out from two international competitions, chapter members were highly motivated in division and district contests to post high scores and garner great audience buzz in advance of their return to the international stage. Seeing folks discuss GNU's third-highest qualifying score going into Anaheim boosted member

confidence and motivation.

"When you're confident about something, you go out and promote it because you're so excited about it," Benson said. "This whole energy just started to take over again. We're riding every ounce of that we can. The challenge is to continue that kind of momentum."

How do other chapters create great internal and external mystique? "I won't give away any of our special sauce," Benson said. "Some of our mystique is unique to our personality, to what we are ... Everyone has to create their own."

## Getting chapter momentum back

For every chapter that has neglected its own back yard by focusing too much on competition, there are other chapters who have created the reverse problem.

"You won't be the best you can be if you don't compete," Benson said. "And then you won't be taking care of your back yard."

"A lot of chapters get caught up in, 'This is just what we do,'" Monson said. That's where GNU was three years ago—following a vision and format that was no longer delivering forward momentum. "Eventually, people just go through the motions. You need to develop a plan, stick to it, and execute. Then after that, create a new plan. The journey never ends."

To paraphrase an old axiom, "Do what you've always done and you might get *increasingly worse* results than you've always gotten." At some point, someone must stop the cycle and inspire chapter members to follow a plan that delivers increasing motivation and rewards.

"You have to stop repeating patterns that don't work," Monson declared. "Choruses need to have strategic planning. Go through it. Just do it." ■

ger. Whatever chapters decide to do, they should not do it alone or in isolation. *(Bill Vermue)*

**... have a clear idea of who they are and ensure everything they do supports that in some way.** Some activities may only indirectly impact this, some will impact it directly, but all activities should be traceable as contributions to the specific goals of the chapter. *(Steve Nester)*

**... go through the exercise of developing and writing down their mission statement and their long-term goals.** The shorter-term goals and plans will then become a lot simpler. Also, create the right balance between fun and work. Even if you have decided to be a competitive chapter, "drill, drill, drill" is boring! *(Lee Daum)*

**... ensure that every man participating in chapter activities realizes personal enjoyment from the**

**activity and shares this realization with others.** If a guy is not having fun, he won't have anything to do with us. *(Mike Banish)*

**... define who they are based on what their members want out of the chapter, and fulfill those needs every week.** Generally, there are two types of choruses: Affiliation and Achievement. Pick one and run with it. We should strive to have at least one of each in a market and not be afraid to send members to the other. We have 30,000 boats to float. Let's see if we can float them all, and find many more boats to add. *(Steve Skolnick)*

**... create an unprecedented level of excitement at every rehearsal.** Members must arrive at a rehearsal excited about what is to take place and depart with a sense of accomplishment and a desire to share those feelings

with others. This will reduce the number of members lost to attrition and help our current members better share the love and excitement this great hobby can bring. If a chapter does not generate such excitement, review your culture and see what needs to change. *(Randy Rensi)*

**... create a "Mountain Peak" experience for members and guests every week.** That may be ringing chords, feeling that they are making a worthwhile contribution to a worthwhile cause, feeling as if they "belong," feeling as if they are learning, growing, improving in some meaningful way. The mountain peak may be different for different chapters, but each chapter should learn what it is for them, go after it, assess the buzz at the end of each meeting, learn from what worked and what didn't, fix it and do it again better next week. Wheeeee! *(Connie Keil)*





**Bob Madigan, a top personality at Washington, D.C.'s top radio station invited Fairfax Jubilaires quartet Downtown to sing for former congresswoman Connie Morella. Then he replayed the performance several times to help with their promotions! Singing Valentines promotions are easy pickings for radio and television. Watch what happens when you ask!**

# Ready for magic on Feb. 14?

This is a family publication, so we must choose our words carefully: We barbershoppers do indeed bear *some* responsibility for the small spike in the birth rate that occurs every year on or around November 14—but only in the most morally upstanding way.

We plead guilty to our uncanny ability to make women weak in the knees. Showing up in a tuxedo has always had an interesting effect that way. We confess that we've got our act down cold—we can make eyes go wet like clockwork. It's just what we do. All it takes is some simple old melodies and the kind of heartfelt lyrics they don't know how to write anymore. Is that so bad?

If you had this kind of power over women, wouldn't *you* use it at every opportunity?

We would, and we do. And we're proud—proud to tell the whole world what we do. Proud that she's still thinking about us long after we've shut the door. But don't envy us. It's a labor of love for us, if not also a darn good fund-raiser.

Just remember that we rarely get so much as a hug out of the transaction, buddy, and we doubt you could say the same. (Which is why we suppose you keep calling us back.) Yeah, we're way better than flowers—but please remember that we include a dozen roses in our deluxe package, so this year, why not show her that you mean it?

### Register and do more at [www.singingvalentines.com](http://www.singingvalentines.com)

Register your chapter or your quartet at [www.singingvalentines.com](http://www.singingvalentines.com)—you never know who will have a special delivery for your quartet(s) to fill! Use [www.singingvalentines.com](http://www.singingvalentines.com) yourself to order a Valentine for a far-away sweetheart. The process is quick, easy and *free*.

New to this whole thing? Read the press kit to answer your questions. The website is complete with videos, audio samples, PSAs that you can localize and send to nearby radio stations, logos to add to your website, and banner ads to help you promote your event. Happy singing! ■

## Swipes 'n' Swaps

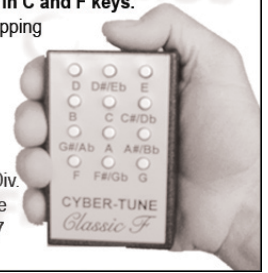
**"New director" ads are free in *The Harmonizer*** (first 50 words) to Society chapters. Other ads are \$25 per column inch. Send to [harmonizer@barbershop.org](mailto:harmonizer@barbershop.org).

The Charleston, WV, chapter is looking for a good deal on 45-50 used top hats. Please contact Dave at 304.205.4803 / [AdnilEnaid59@yahoo.com](mailto:AdnilEnaid59@yahoo.com), or Ron at 304.345.3005 / [marbears@aol.com](mailto:marbears@aol.com).

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