



International Medalist
GREAT NORTHERN UNION
CHORUS
HILLTOP CHAPTER • SPEBSQSA



GNU's News

October 29, 2009

Volume 14

Issue #3



GNU 2009 Land O' Lakes District Chorus Champs!

The Mayo Civic Center in Rochester was the site of The Great Northern Union's Land O' Lakes District competition victory. The eighty-man chorus scored 1065 out of a possible 1200 points to post an average score of 88.8. Midwest Vocal Express of Greendale, Wisconsin finished second in the competition with an average score of 82.5. A total of nineteen choruses competed.



[Land O' Lakes District Chorus Finals: Rochester, Minnesota](#) [October 24, 2009](#)

- 1 Hilltop, MN Great Northern Union 88.8
- 2 Greendale, WI Midwest Vocal Express 82.5
- 3 Minneapolis, MN Commodores 78.5
- 4 Fargo-Moorhead, ND Great Plains Harmony 74.9
- 5 West Allis, WI Heart of Harmony Chorus 67.6
- 6 Appleton, WI Fox Valleyaires Chorus 66.9
- 7 Stevens Point, WI Northern Gateway Chorus 65.6
- 8 St Croix Valley, MN Croix Chordsmen Chorus 64.5
- 9 Mankato, MN Riverblenders 64.3
- 10 Oshkosh, WI WinnebagoLand 64.2
- 11 Polk County, WI Indianhead Chorus 62.8
- 11 Racine, WI Racine Dairy Statesmen 62.8
- 13 Greater St Paul Area, MN North Star Chorus 62.0
- 14 Plymouth, WI Hometown Harmony Tradition 61.8
- 15 Willmar, MN West Central Connection 60.3
- 16 Winnipeg, MB Golden Chordsmen 59.9
- 17 La Crosse, WI Coulee Chordsmen 58.8
- 18 Manitowoc, WI Clipper City Chordsmen 58.2
- 18 Albert Lea, MN Harmony Junction 58.2

Top Ten District

Chorus Scores 2009

1. *Vocal Majority, Dallas Metro, TX 94.9*
 2. *The Westminster Chorus, Westminster, CA 92.4*
 3. *Sound of the Rockies, Denver Mile High, CO 89.8*
 4. *Great Northern Union, Hilltop, MN 88.8*
The Alliance, Greater Central Ohio, OH 88.8
-

6. *The Northern Lights, Toronto, ON 88.3*

7. *Alexandria Harmonizers, Alexandria, VA 87.5*

8. *Music City Chorus, Nashville, TN 83.9*

9. *Circle City Sound, Greater Indianapolis, IN 81.6*

10. *Central Standard, Metro Kansas City, MO 81.5*

Expedition Wins the 2009 District Quartet Title!

In the quartet competition, Expedition was crowned 2009 District Champion with an average score of 75.2. Quartet members are Jeremy Ganswindt, Jay Fahl, Bryan Ziegler, and Jake Umhoefer. Engage was runner-up with a 72.6. A total of nineteen quartets performed some great music during the two-rounds of competition.



Expedition



Finals:

- 1 **Expedition** 75.2
- 2 **Engage** 72.6
- 3 **CounterPoint** 71.6
- 4 **Sound Image** 70.7
- 5 **The Cheery-O's** 70.4
- 6 **Quantum** 67.9
- 7 **Perfect Timing** 66.3
- 8 **3 Men Of Song** 65.9
- 9 **Notorious** 65.1

In This Issue:

District Results-page 1-2;

Director's Corner-page 3-4;

Autumn Choral Classic-page 5-6;

The Singing Judge-page 6-7;

Joe Connelly-page 7

Twins Sings-page 7-9;

New Member Profile-page 9-10;

Season Finale Nov. 21-page 11-12

More District Photos-page 12-13;

Quartets-page 15

Great Northern Union-Officers & Directors

Tom Semple – President

Bob Dowma – Treasurer

Roger Wambheim – Secretary

Ken Slinde – VP-Membership

Wally Brink – VP-Marketing & Public Relations, Project Manager

Gary Little – Chapter Chorus Manager

Luke Norell – Member at Large

Scott Kvigne – Member at Large, Assistant Music Director

Jay Fahl – Member at Large

Brent Buresh – VP-Music & Performance

Bill Lydecker – Immediate Past President

Marty Monson – VP-Chapter Development

Ken Gilmore – Member at Large

GNU's News is an official publication of the Hilltop Chapter, 10,000 Lakes Division, LOL District, of the Barbershop Harmony Society. Bulletin material may be contributed by chapter members, copied from Society Publications, or may be borrowed from other chapter bulletins. All articles will be credited to the author. Articles not carrying a by-line have been written by the editor, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the officers of this chapter.

Terry Wheeler, editor
e-mail: ttwheeler_56150@hotmail.com
Home Phone: 507-662-5166
Cell: 605-321-1607

GNU's News October 29, 2009



Director's Corner by Peter Benson

P-R-I-D-E comes from your **P**ersonal **R**esponsibility **I**n **D**eveloping **E**xcellence.

This article will outline Pete's "State of the GN-Union Address" given on Oct. 29, 2009

- Recap 3 year plan
 - What did we do? Why did we do it?
How did it work?
 - 20 yrs/Periodic Medals/Caught in a cycle hoping to get better
 - Review of 5 M's
 - Decision to sit out of Int'l competition in 07 & 08.
- My personal commitment to winning a gold medal with GNU
 - Ideas about how to do that
 - It takes more than just working harder each year and trying a little harder. We did not achieve 3rd place this year, by just trying harder.
 - Strategy. Our accomplishment was due to many calculated strategies.
- Factors that led to our success in 2009
 - Many Exciting Performing Opportunities
 - Recognition in our own backyard!
 - NC-ACDA Convention
 - Mini Tours
 - Amazing Collaborations (St. Olaf, Luther,

- TC-Gospel, St. Johns, The Singers)
 - Mystique
 - BHS: What's going on with the GNU? Where are they?
 - Great material (contest arrangements)
 - District Score (Int'l Seeding)
 - Ample time to develop uptune!
 - Had the opportunity to work PYAAMH for over 18 months
 - Incidentally, the same was true for Midnight Choo Choo, the last time we earned a medal in 2005.
 - We continued to increase other repertoire and do more performing as well.
 - Excellent Contest Material (PYAAMH, BIOMY, MBY)
 - Numbers
 - We had an additional 20 men on the risers (86) from the previous contest (66).
 - Do you have to be big to be good? No, but you have to be big to win! Statistically, you either need to be 120+ or have an average age of under 30 to win. This cannot be overlooked. We must grow in order to win.
 - Great leadership, coaching, and smart working.
 - Not just belief, but belief with action and measured success.
 - It's not the will to win that matters, it's the will to prepare to win. How are we preparing to win?
- What is our goal in International Contests?
- What can we learn from past success/failure?
- Proposal for Upcoming International Contests.
 - Continue to be perennial LOL District Champions!
 - Set our sights on Kansas City 2010 – Forego Philadelphia Int'l
 - Gives us a chance to grow
 - Explanation of custom arrangement process
 - Added Mystique Factor
- Plans for the future!! (Your help needed)
 - New uptune Dec/Jan. (plan to sing at District next fall)
 - Try to get ahead with arrangements for following year (discuss hurdles)
 - CD Release (Early 2010)
 - Repertoire Development
 - Discuss need to turn over more rep for Season Ticket Audience and ourselves!
 - Work for higher standards of learning among all singers
 - Comprehensive programs for vocal techniques (specifically word sounds)
 - Radical scientific riser placement strategies
 - Membership Growth/Retention Teams
- 2010 Highlights (partial list)
 - 6th Annual Collegiate w/ The Singing Statesmen from UW Eau Claire and '09 BHS Collegiate Champs The Vagrants
 - 2010 Tour to Luther College & SE MN
 - 2010 Season Finale with StormFront



The Singers Join the GNU in Concert (from www.gnunion.com)

It was a great collaboration when The Singers and the GNU joined together in concert in Bloomington
by *Wally Brink*

The Great Northern Union Chorus (GNU) presented an Autumn Choral Classic concert with Twin Cities ensemble The Singers. This was the first ever collaboration concert between the two music groups.

The concert event was held Saturday, September 26, 2009, at St. Michael's Lutheran Church in Bloomington.

Founded in 2004, The Singers organization is dedicated to giving world-class performances of the finest choral literature. The Singers exist to serve as artists, educators, and ambassadors of the choral art form. Dedicated to the work of today's composers, The Singers has premiered and commissioned nearly forty new works since its founding. The ensemble has been honored to debut works by Stephen Paulus, Eleanor Daley, Craig Carnahan, as well as from

three composers-in-residence, Abbie Betinis, Jocelyn Hagen, and Joshua Shank. The Singers is directed by Matthew Culloton.

The eighty-five member Great Northern Union Chorus has earned the right to be considered as one of North America's elite men's a cappella choruses. Since their inception in the mid-1980's, the Great Northern Union's emphasis on excellence in performance has resulted in numerous medalist performances. Competing against the "best of the best" that the Barbershop Harmony Society has to offer, the GNU has earned numerous "Top Ten in the World" placements over the years. In July 2009, the GNU competed in the International Barbershop Harmony Chorus Competition in Anaheim, CA and earned a third place bronze medal out of hundreds of competing choruses worldwide. The GNU is directed by Peter Benson.

Joining the concert was Hopkins High School student ensembles GEOFF and Midori.

It was a unique collaboration with the perfect interpretation of The Singers and the high impact medalist harmonies of the GNU!



From the Singing Judge by Jim Emery

Oo-ay-err Fer-uh-mm Hee-err?

By the time you read this, we will have finished our LOL District competition and be working hard preparing for our concert series finale. We should have successfully defended our LOL chorus championship and be looking ahead to how to take ourselves to an even higher level in 2010.

Before we do that, we must thank our talented musical leadership led so ably by director Pete Benson. Pete's knowledge of vocal fundamentals and his musicianship are unrivaled anywhere, and we are lucky to have him at our helm.

So what will 2010 bring to take us from an 88-92 chorus to a 94-96 chorus? One key is to go back to the fundamentals that bring the unity heard most recently from the 2007 gold medalist Westminster Chorus.

What are the factors of unity? The Singing Category description in the Barbershop Harmony Society's Contest & Judging Handbook states, "The ingredients of ensemble unity include matched word sounds and timbre, synchronization and precision, sound flow, and diction."

We've worked quite hard over the past year on improving the uniformity of our vocal resonance to produce a balanced resonance or timbre as our default and to be able to draw on a focused front resonance when appropriate and a rich back resonance when the song calls for it. While we have more work to do in this area, I feel really good about the progress we have made already.



Dawn Holmberg's photo
album: <http://tinyurl.com/ybqafdk>

Dan Meyer's photo
album: <http://tinyurl.com/y8j2hd4>

Although there are exceptions, I also feel good about our sound flow. Punchy or disconnected singing pops up occasionally, but our habits seem to have moved on successfully from those days.

So what's missing? While it may not be exciting initially, some really focused efforts on unanimity of word sounds and diction will truly catapult us to the next level. Many of the old timers recall the early days of the GNU when we spent hours getting every singer to use full word sounds consistently. Turning diphthongs, singing through singable consonants, and the like produced a characteristically clean sound that the GNU was known by. It is time now to go back to some of that work again.

Lest the focus be strictly on mechanics, the Artistry section of the Singing Category description adds, "Expressive techniques include vowel sound duration, diphthong and singable consonant timing, inflection, and enunciation. Although precise diction is necessary to enable the listener to comprehend the words, the singer should use the word sounds in such a way that the listener's attention is drawn to the lyric's meaning and not its execution."

Both Pete and Mark Hale have urged us to use full word sounds to bring even more power to the climax points of our recent contest ballad and uptune. If you haven't stood out front and heard the chorus sing "I cried and cried for you" (from "Blame It On My Youth") and turn the diphthongs ("crah-eed and crah-eed foh-er ee-oo") all together, you may not realize just how powerful it can be. But it is truly a quantum leap in its impact when we all do it together.

So do contest judges really care about this? The Singing Category description puts it this way, "Larger choruses can generate a larger quantity of sound than smaller ones, as well as a greater ability to bury the problems of any individual. However, the judging of choruses emphasizes the quartet-like cleanliness of the sound, not the volume." In short,

yes. We do care. And not just in the Singing Category. This kind of unity in our sound allows Pete's plan for each song to be delivered more musically (Music Category) and with more audience impact (Presentation Category). And oh, by the way, audiences really like it, too!

So stay tuned after the District contest and especially starting in January as we spend more time getting each singer's attention focused in this area. Be prepared ("bee per-ee-pay-errd"!) to raise your personal bar in this area. But also be prepared for the goose bump results that will come from it!



Joe Connelly Coaching Session September 24, 2009



"Take Me Out to the Ballgame"



Photos by Kathy Litchfield, John Babbs & Tracy Wheeler



As reported on gnunion.com

The Great Northern Union was invited and accepted the opportunity to sing the National Anthem for the Twins/Royals game on Fri. Oct. 2, 2009. The game was the first of three games and the very last series played at Metrodome before the Twins move to Target Field in 2010.

The GNU has performed the anthem with great acclaim for the Twins, Vikings, Timberwolves, and Wild throughout its 23 year history. This is the second time in 2009 the GNU was invited to perform the anthem for the Twins organization.



GNU Hosts 5th Annual BHS Day

by Wally Brink

On Sunday, August 16 the GNU hosted the 5th annual Barbershop Day at the Dome. Barbershoppers from chapters around the Land O' Lakes District (and a couple from Canada) converged for a great day of singing, fellowship and baseball.





New Member Profile
by Terry Wheeler

Membership Development Chairman, Ken Slinde, has been encouraging me to get some new member profiles in this newsletter, so I contacted the new member I know best: Kent Mickelson. He wouldn't return my calls, so I'll write about myself instead.

I've only been a part of the Great Northern Union since January, but it feels like a lot longer. I mean that in a good way. Thank you to everyone who has welcomed me. Your support and encouragement quickly changed my speaking about the GNU from *they* to *we*. Kent Mickelson and I have talked many times on our long journeys to and from rehearsal how this experience is very special. As we strive to rehearse and perform at a *gold* level, we bring immeasurable joy and hope to our audiences and to each other. There is no greater purpose on earth. It's the reason we go the distance.

It is amazing how being a part of the GNU helps

me with my attitude in my jobs at First National Bank in Lakefield and KKOJ Radio in Jackson, as a member of the United Methodist Church, and in my personal relationships with family and friends.

I'm married to Tracy Titus from Okabena, Minnesota. We celebrated our "Rod Carew" anniversary this year. If you don't know, ask any true Twins baseball fan and they'll tell you how many years that is. Tracy is the office manager of the Lakefield Standard newspaper. We have two daughters. Heather is finishing her PhD in Genetics at Stanford University. Jamie, graduate of St. Cloud State and attendee at many GNU rehearsals and concerts this past year is now a social studies teacher in Chicago. I thank them for their support and encouragement.

Thanks to Rick and Vickie Hurd, and Ken Slinde for inviting me to the guest night back in January. I had worked with Ken on the Minnesota Twins anthem sings. Rick and Vickie used to live near us in southwest Minnesota. On January 15, Kent Mickelson and I packed our snowmobile suits and braved the below zero weather 160 miles to Richfield. I recall arriving at the church, after missing the turn and driving past it. We walked in and saw all these men talking, some singing, many laughing and wearing professional-looking name tags. We signed in, received a bottle of water and guest music folder. At seven o'clock, the music started and we lined up for physical warm-up. We moved, stretched, whooped and hollered until someone said, "to the risers gentlemen!" The risers: what a special place. The sound around me was impressive and reminded me of singing at the Twins games. I remembered being at the Metrodome, thinking how much fun it was to sing for director, Pete Benson. Here I was doing it again. During that guest night, I sang when I felt comfortable, enjoyed listening to the wonderful sound, and

was totally wowed by the presentation of the contest set. Kent and I talked on the way home about how much fun we had, how illogical and impractical traveling five hours round-trip every Thursday would be, but if we didn't at least try we'd regret it.

All the time, money and effort since then has been worth it. Auditions, the division contest, concert tours, singing at worship services, socializing, tags, voice lessons, the international contest, more Twins games, district contest, and all those Thursday night rehearsals have combined for an experience I cannot find words to describe. Thanks to Kent Mickelson, for recruiting me into this great hobby as the director of the Windom Chordhustlers, and for making sure we have plenty of food for our weekly car trips. Thanks to the founders and sustainers of the GNU for their vision and leadership. They tell us the best part of the journey is yet to come! I believe it!

(I've shared my thoughts, now I invite you fellow GNU members to share yours. Please submit your personal story or just a few lines to help us get to know each other better. We'll include them in future issues of this newsletter. Please e-mail to ttwheeler_56150@hotmail.com. Include a favorite photo if you wish, too. Thank you.)



2009 Season Finale Lineup is All-Champion

By Wally Brink

The Great Northern Union has gone the distance in 2009 and now returns to Benson Great Hall on the campus of Bethel University to perform their last and biggest concert of their season. The Season Finale promises to be the most impressive concert yet with guest performances from newly crowned International Champions Crossroads Quartet and 2007 LOL District Champions Vocality.

Two concerts will be presented and are set for Saturday, November 21, 2009, at 1 and 7pm at beautiful Benson Great Hall at Bethel University, 3900 Bethel Drive, St. Paul, MN. Reserved tickets are \$10-\$35 and available by calling 651-454-4459 or email tickets@gnunion.com. Cash, check and major credit cards accepted. Senior, student, and group discounts are available.

Crossroads is a highly anticipated new vocal quartet steeped in the tradition of the Barbershop genre. Crossroads entertains audiences with a wide variety of musical styles in addition to Barbershop, including Vocal Jazz, Blues, Gospel, standards from the Great American Songbook, and Pop classics.

Although they are “geographically challenged” living in four different states within the U.S., Crossroads boasts four very versatile champion vocalists, all of whom have earned the coveted “gold medal” awarded each year to the Barbershop Harmony Society’s World Champion Quartet. Most recently Crossroads was crowned the 2009 International Quartet Champions at the Barbershop Harmony Society Quartet Competition in Anaheim, CA in July.

The Great Northern Union is an internationally recognized, 85 member auditioned men's a cappella chorus based in the Twin Cities and draws members from the tri-state area. Founded in 1985, the GNU delivers an emotionally charged message through music that has earned them awards both regionally and nationally. Most recently, the GNU competed at the Barbershop Harmony Society (BHS) International Chorus Competition in Anaheim, CA, where they earned a GNU record score of 92.1 and bronze third place medal. The GNU is directed by Peter Benson.

The 2009 Season Finale concert is the final of four collaboration concerts which included the talents of Saint John's University Men's Chorus, Wissota Voices, Minneapolis Commodores, Vocality, X-Factor and Engage Quartet and The Singers.

REHEARSALS---Fun Through Musical Excellence

The GNU meets Thursday evenings for a highly focused, incredibly fun rehearsal. Occasionally there are changes to our rehearsal schedule. Check this Web site www.gnunion.com or our Hotline 952-314-4842 for up-to-date rehearsal information.

P-R-I-D-E comes from your Personal Responsibility In Developing Excellence.

Our rehearsals are always open to the public. Anyone can come to watch, but the real fun is in participation. Visit the GNU on a First Visit Night Rehearsal where you can learn the GNU style of a cappella singing and be a part of GNU high impact harmony. For more information on how to become a member of the GNU visit the join us link at gnunion.com or email membership@gnunion.com.



Breakfast at District





Physical Warm-up

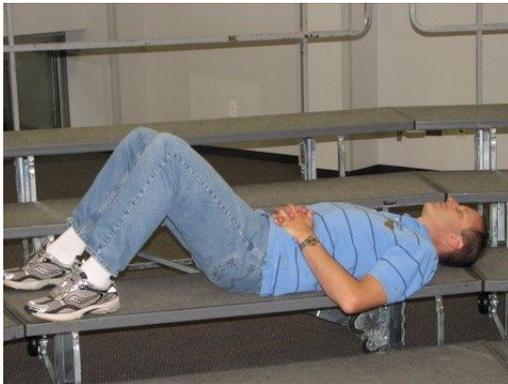


Riser Crew



Good Work!





Dreaming of a District Championship







Jeremy Ganswindt *Tenor*
 Jay Fahl *Lead*
 Bryan Ziegler *Baritone*
 Jake Umhoefer *Bass*
 Contact Jake at bbrshopper@yahoo.com

Ellis Jones, Tenor Bruce Gray, Lead



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Barbershop Harmony & Sleight of Hand

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 bgray@gustavus.edu



Don Miller, Baritone Bill Lydecker, Bass

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 A Barbershop Quartet



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 Keith Fransen - Tenor
 Matt Hall - Bass
 Jim Hall - Baritone

Contact
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Engage

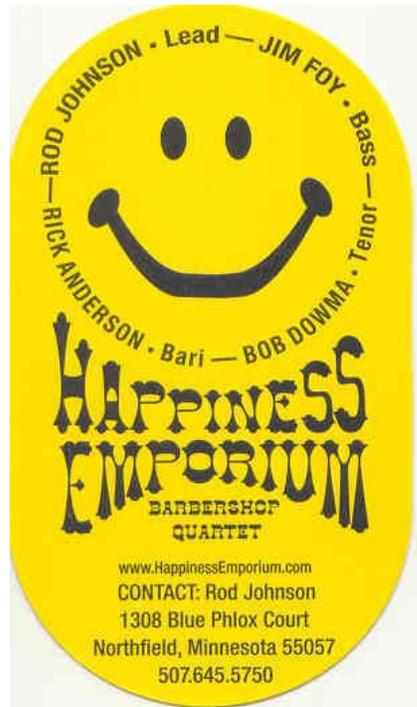
Barbershop Quartet

Minneapolis MN 612-866-1856
 WWW.ENGAGEQUARTET.WEBS.COM

JAY TONY DAVID ROBERT



VOCALITY@VOCALITYQUARTET.COM 651.307.7248



—ROD JOHNSON • Lead— JIM FOY • Bass—
 RICK ANDERSON • Bari— BOB DOWMA • Tenor—

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