



GNU's News

# International Medalist GREAT NORTHERN UNION CHORUS

August 31, 2010

Hilltop Chapter



International  
News on  
Page 4

Volume 15

Issue #4



1<sup>st</sup> Ever GNU Summer Collegiate Chorus Wows Como Crowd!



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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

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*GNU's News August 31, 2010*



**Director's  
Corner  
by Peter  
Benson**

Competition is in the air! If you've been part of the chorus for any length of time you know that at a certain number of weeks prior to contest, something strange happens. There is a sort of wall that breaks down, a new corner is turned, and the level of concentration and excellence suddenly goes up. That's not to say that we don't always operate at a high level, but there seems to be a distinction when it comes to contest preparation. I think you'll all agree that the turning point for this particular cycle happened at last week's rehearsal.

So, what is it that makes competition so appealing to the GNU? After all, with our schedule, we get the opportunity to perform for enthusiastic crowds quite often. We even get to experience the thrill of standing ovations more often than not. And we love it! But I think contests are different because we not only get to engage an audience, but a judging panel as well. It's a way for us to show our skills to 9 guys who are experts in what we do. It's a risk, and we are vulnerable, but that's why it's so thrilling! We also get to sing for our peers who understand the idiosyncrasies of the art form and really appreciate the level at which we are able to perform. And of course I have to mention the obvious, it's fun to win!!

(continued on page 3)

For the record, I have been in full support of the GNU's strategic planning and even our decisions to sit out of contests. They have proved to be wise choices for us. However, I think we've proven something through our amazing performances over the past few years and our continued contest success. "You can take the boys out of competition, but you can't take the competition out of the boys!!"

I can't wait for Fargo!!

### **SIZZLIN SUMMER WITH GNU**

Submitted by Adam Woods & Terry Wheeler

What an amazing summer GNU has had, and we're excited about the upcoming events we have planned.

We formed the GNU Summer Collegiate Chorus with 35 young men representing over 10 colleges and high schools. Their debut performance was at the Como Park Barbershop Concert on July 13<sup>th</sup>. For those of you who were there, we think you'd agree it was amazing! The good singing these guys did excited men of all ages about our hobby and its future.

On August 5<sup>th</sup>, we were guest performers at the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA) conference held at St Olaf College in Northfield. Once again we became excited about the future as the students and their directors gave us multiple standing ovations.

On August 22<sup>nd</sup>, we joined our LO'L District brothers to sing the national anthem, God Bless America and Take Me Out to the Ballgame at Target Field in Minneapolis. What a thrill to sing for 40,000 people.

The future holds many exciting things. In September, we will be performing on the Youth in Harmony Autumn Choral Classic with The Minnesota Boys Choir at St Michael's Lutheran Church in Bloomington. A great show designed to excite young people about barbershop harmony and singing in general.

We are honored to be invited to perform as part of the City of Lakes Chorus (Sweet Adeline) International Send-Off Show. The date is Sunday, October 3<sup>rd</sup>. The show time is 3pm with the venue TBD (in the metro area).

The Great Northern Union will be joining our LO'L brothers, once again, at the district contest and convention in Fargo this October.

November is home to the Finale of our 2010 concert series and will be held the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> at Benson Hall of Bethel College. The guest quartet will be none other than your 2010, newly crowned International Champion Quartet.....STORM FRONT!!!

Should you want any more info on our upcoming performances, please visit our website [www.gnunion.com](http://www.gnunion.com) You might even see a sneak peek of our about to be released album Brand GNU!



# The GNU Connection in Philly!

*The Great Northern Union Chorus didn't compete at the BHS International convention this year, but quartets with GNU connections were among the brightest stars of the shows!*

*Happiness Emporium  
Expedition  
Vocality  
Storm Front*



Happiness Emporium were crowd favorites once again at the annual Association of International Champions show. GNU's Bob Dowma (far left) and Rick Anderson (far right).



Expedition won 5<sup>th</sup> place bronze medals in the collegiate contest and earned 21<sup>st</sup> place and semi-final mic tester honors in the main event. GNU's Jay Fahl (second from left).



Vocality earned 22<sup>nd</sup> place out of the 51 quartets in the main contest. GNU's Tony Blackwood is (second from left). Robert Albachten (far right) and David Boyd (second from right) are also listed on the GNU chapter roster.





Storm Front scored a 91.3 in the finals and were crowned 2010 Gold Medalists. Former GNU singer Syd Libsack (second from left) and his cohorts entertained the international audiences with their hilarious routines and tremendous singing.



Syd Libsack still maintains dual membership with GNU and the Sound of the Rockies Chorus. Storm Front will be GNU's Guest Quartet for their Season Finale November 13 & 14.

Syd gave us permission to reprint the following e-mail. First, GNU's John Kleiber sent this:  
Dear Syd,

CONGRATS to you & Storm Front  
- wow, what can I say!  
Man, I am so proud of you.

I know you've inspired Jay Fahl, lead of "Expedition", GNU member, college quartet 5th place and BHS 21st place this year - the path to the top is there!

See you in November,  
John K

Here's Syd's reply:  
Hi John,

Thanks for the note! We are still on Cloud 9, and I don't think it's even really sunk in yet. And to think that we are now in the same "ranks" of our heroes like Bob Downma - well, that just doesn't seem real! :-)

I've had a lot of people recently ask us who is a member of GNU, since that's listed under our represented chapters. I guess it's been so long since I sang with GNU that nobody knows anymore! :-) But the truth is, GNU gave me my first taste of barbershop competition. Of course, I grew up watching my dad sing in chorus and quartet in Nebraska, but it wasn't until I joined GNU that I really got hooked on it and developed my hunger for competition. When I first left GNU, I didn't want to let go of my membership just in case I was able to return quickly! Well now, 10 years after my last GNU performance, it doesn't seem likely that I'll be able to return to the GNU risers any time soon. But who knows? Regardless of performance, keeping my membership with GNU keeps some of my best memories alive year after year! I sang with Sound of the Rockies for 9 years straight, and have great memories with them too. I will probably keep a dual membership with SOR and GNU forever. I kinda like having two "home" chapters. :-)

I love hearing how Jay Fahl is excited by the path that I traveled over the past 10 years. I definitely remember my college contest days like it was yesterday. And I'll say this - if my college quartet was competing in today's college contest, I'm pretty sure we'd be lucky to break into the top 10! In fact, I think I looked at those scores last week and noticed that our winning score would have put us somewhere around 14th in this year's contest. Wow!!

Anyway - thanks again for the note. Can't wait to share the stage with GNU again this fall!

-Syd



**From The International Judging Pit**  
Jim Emery, Singing Judge

Very few individuals ever get the chance to judge an International contest, but I was very privileged to have that opportunity for the Philadelphia quartet and chorus contests a couple weeks ago. I thought it might be interesting to share a few thoughts on what that's actually like.

First, it's incredible! It's too bad that everyone can't have the opportunity to see and hear this many top quartets and choruses in one week from a distance of 10 feet (quartets) or 30 feet (choruses). What a thrill it was. Of course, the judging panel had to do a little work to get those seats, but that part was really exciting, too.

In most contests that we judges judge, it's rare to have more than 2-3 competitors in the 76+ scoring range. (76 is the qualifying score for quartets to go to International, and most choruses at International are at that scoring level or higher, too.) While we focus very hard to get our scores absolutely on the nose in every contest, in a lot of contests the difference between an 82 and an 83 is only the relative seeding of competitors going on to International. That one point difference in the International contest itself, however, could cost a competitor several places and occasionally a medal. So, although it doesn't seem possible, we agonize over every point even more at the International contest.

A corollary to the above is that a competitor scoring at about 78 in most contests will clearly stand out from the rest of the competitors in that contest. At International, there may be several dozen competitors at that level. So discriminating between each one requires some serious concentration. That can be a pretty grueling task for nearly 50 quartets or 30 choruses in one day. That energy investment is what makes me feel like we earned those good seats up front.

In addition to getting our scores precisely accurate, there are some other interesting challenges for an International judging panel member. We see most of these in other contests, just not to the same degree. One worth mentioning is judging the quartets and choruses from your own district that you know very well. I was very proud of all the performances turned in by the LOL quartets and chorus. But when I'm judging their performances, it's critical that they get the same treatment as any other competitor. I think you can imagine the temptation to really reward your friends when they nail it or perhaps be overly critical when they don't quite measure up to their usual standards. But we judges have to shake off those expectations and give the same score as if some other unknown competitor from a different district just gave that performance. That can be a challenge, but it is part of our judge training to be able to do that consistently. No matter what numbers I wrote down, I was still very proud of every LOL competitor. They all did themselves and our district proud.

Another challenge can be the acoustic environment at International. At many Division or even District contests, the contest venues aren't all that large, so there aren't many acoustical interferences like echoes, columns, or nearby big speakers.

(continued on page 7)

Our International contests are always held in very large spaces, usually either arenas or conventions centers. Very few of these spaces are designed to accommodate small groups without their own private sound crews. So getting the sound right on the stage for the competitors, in the hall for the audience, and in the pit for the judges is an extremely difficult challenge. While I often hear complaints from audience members about the sound at International contests, I suspect that very few of the complainers have any idea just how difficult it is to transform these big barns designed for athletic events or business expositions into friendly acoustic spaces for nearly 100 different performers of from 4-150 men with very different sounds and a very discriminating audience. At each contest there is one designated judge, called the asterisk judge, who is responsible for working with the sound and lighting people to make sure that they have everything as good as possible for that contest. I had that challenge in Philadelphia as this year's asterisk judge. So, if you didn't like what you heard, I guess you can blame me. Sigh... Sometime I'll buy you a beer and explain all the specific challenges and tradeoffs we faced in the Philadelphia Convention Center!

One other interesting observation about the contest this year was the amazing variety of the top level performers. Anyone who thinks Storm Front, Old School, Ringmasters, Musical Island Boys, and The Allies all sound the same just wasn't listening! Ditto for Westminster, Vocal Majority, Toronto Northern Lights,

Sound of the Rockies, and Alexandria Harmonizers. What an amazing variety we heard from these competitors. The incredible vocal and performing skills from each group, while bringing their own unique sounds and styles to the stage, was a real treat for everyone in the audience, including the judges. I can hardly wait until Kansas City to see what next year's International competitors have for us.

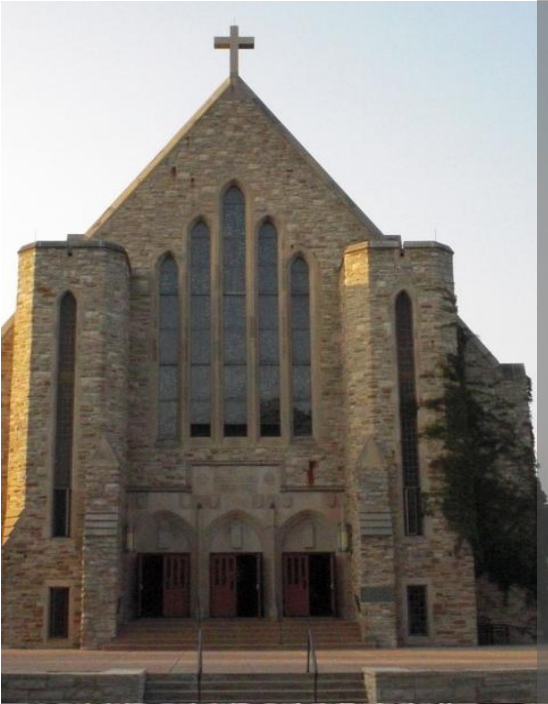
These are just a few thoughts from a guy in the pit this year. If you're interested in more or have some questions about the judging experience, corner me at the District contest in Fargo this fall. I'd love to ramble on even more. Thanks for listening.



***Mark Hale Coaching Session: Saturday July 24, 2010***





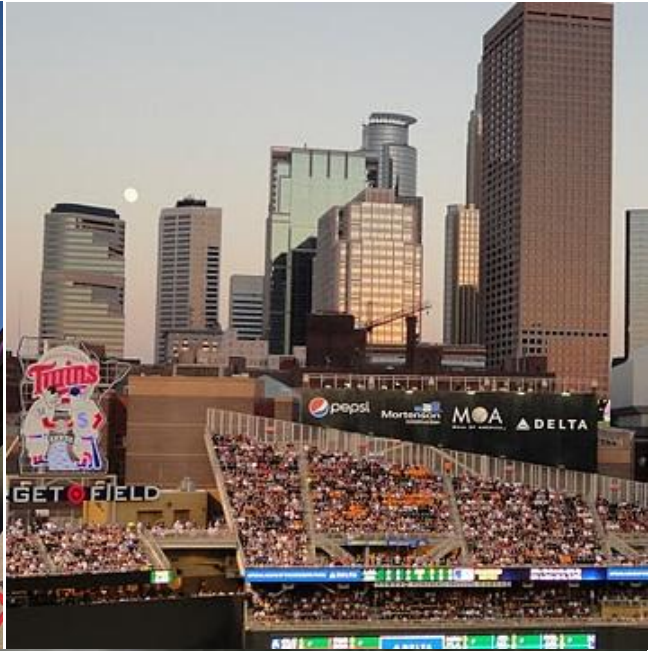


American Choral Directors Association  
Performance 8/5/10  
St Olaf College-Northfield, MN



# Take Me Out to the Twins Game 8/22/10





*Youth In Harmony Autumn Choral Classic*

**Date:** Saturday, September 25  
**Time:** 7:30pm  
**Location:** St Michael's Lutheran Church - Bloomington

The Great Northern Union and the Minnesota Boy Choir team up to present a return of the popular Youth In Harmony concert collaboration. The Minnesota Boy Choir, directed by Mark Johnson, challenges boys and young men from many backgrounds to the highest standards of choral music.

*Sunday October 3 – City of Lakes International Send off Show*

We are honored to be invited to perform as part of the City of Lakes Chorus (Sweet Adeline) International Send-Off Show. The date is Sunday, October 3rd. The show time is 3pm with the venue TBD (in the metro area).

Monday October 11 - EXTRA rehearsal  
Friday October 22 through Sunday October 24 – District, Fargo, ND

*Season Finale featuring 2010 Gold Medalist Storm Front*

**Date:** Saturday, November 13 & Sunday, November 14  
**Time:** 7:00pm & 2pm  
**Location:** Benson Great Hall, Bethel Univ. - Arden Hills

The GNU returns to Benson Great Hall for our final concerts of 2010. Traditionally our biggest concerts of the season, the 2010 Season Finales will feature championship performances and spectacular a cappella singing in an intimate concert setting. Sharing the stage with the GNU will be the 2010 BHS Gold Medalist Champion Storm Front Quartet. Be a part of this exceptional concert experience as we celebrate our 2010 season and look ahead to our exciting 25th anniversary.

\*\*\*Rehearsals from Finale through the end of the year\*\*\*

Save the dates: 2011  
Spring Tour May 13-15, 2011



Rehearsals are held on Thursdays at 7pm at the United Methodist Church of Peace at 64<sup>th</sup> and Xerxes in Richfield. For more information contact Membership Vice-President Ken Slinde at [gnubass@comcast.net](mailto:g nubass@comcast.net) or 952-884-4975.



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