



International Medalist
GREAT NORTHERN UNION
CHORUS



HILLTOP CHAPTER • SPEBSQSA

10,000 LAKES DIVISION - LAND O' LAKES DISTRICT

Vol. 9 - Issue #6

GNU's NEWS

Nov 2004

The Great Northern Union reclaims the district title!

It took more than one year, but Roger Meyer's on-stage promise to get the District Trophy back in the hands of GNU did materialize when Director Pete Benson and current President Bill Lydecker received the trophy on stage during the evening performance at District. The excitement of the afternoon announcement was still apparent as we accepted the applause of the audience, just as we had earlier received the standing ovation after our performance during the contest. What a high! And what a motivation to continue our quest for a medal in Salt Lake City. As Mark Hale, one of our coaches and one of the music judges in the pit for the district contest, said, we have what it takes to get a medal, but it takes a ton of work between now and Salt Lake City in July. Bring it on!



Quest is the 2004 LOL District Quartet Champion

Quest, with it's high energy performances, took the district championship ahead of the strongest field of quartet competitors the district has seen in years. There were 4 groups that scored above 70% and Quest topped them all with a 76.5% average. That score is good enough to qualify them for International competition if they do as well at prelims in May. The members of **Quest** (pictured left to right) are Brent Graham (bari), Mike Laurel (lead), Tim Milbrandt (bass) and Jay Althof (tenor). Congratulations guys!

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I suppose it could be said of the GNU that we are so focused on our next goal that we seldom spend enough time wallowing in our successes. Well, I hope you have all taken at least some time to wallow, especially you "first time District Champs" (like me). Truthfully, it is a good thing to celebrate our win because it is proof that

setting goals, staying on course, and working smart (in the model) pays off. Mark Hale said he has never heard the GNU sing better. Although it is no secret that this chorus has been making enormous improvements all along, it's still nice to have a big trophy to show for it! Way to go.

What next? I'm glad you asked. Gentlemen, we have only scratched the surface of our potential. Mark Hale has stated several times, and especially last weekend, that our biggest need right now is to build members. I agree wholeheartedly. The impact of what we now do with 60 singers could become dangerous with 90 to 100 men on the risers. If we do, our success will be unlimited. If we don't, I'm afraid we have already met our potential. It is not my job to map out how we're going to do it, although I'm pretty sure I can tell you how not to. As your director, I'm just telling you that it needs to happen and the time is now! No more excuses.

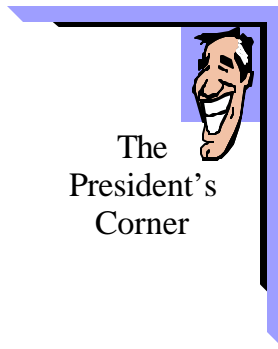


Oh yeah, and in case I don't say it enough, thanks for doing what you do. Standing on stage with that trophy on Saturday night was one of the proudest moments of my barbershop career. Thank you for the honor.

Pete



Congratulations and thank you for rising to the challenge. The first place finish in Appleton means we do not have to enter the preliminary contest on Thursday in Salt Lake City. That decision has to be made by the **Midwest Vocal Express**. I have no doubt that they will be there eager to qualify for Saturday's contest.



In continuing with comments about our major issues, director retention is very important to our moving forward. For two years, Pete has driven 3-4 hours from North Dakota on Thursday afternoons to direct our rehearsals. Then, he drives back home after rehearsal and teaches his regular class schedule on Friday. He makes a similar trip for each performance. This dedication to GNU is outstanding. However, the time may come when this trip becomes too demanding. The board has held several discussions about possibly finding employment in the Twin Cities or nearby. We have no solution yet, but our attention to this issue will continue.

Membership continues to hold steady but there is no doubt that we need to increase our number of active singers by at least 50% in order to have a good sized chorus at performances and to compete for a medal at the international contest level. No membership team can accomplish that with out the help of it's members. While we need to be sure that guests are treated in a way that makes them want to come back, (and Don Knecht is doing a wonderful job of that) each of us needs to become a salesman/recruiter for the GNU. You should be able to convey to potential members what it is that keeps you coming back week after week to rehearsals that can be very demanding. All of us need to be reminded to interact with any guests during the evening to insure that they feel welcome to return.

Shall we advance or fall back? It is up to each of us.

Bill Lydecker
President of the GNU

Formal contest photos by William Kapinski Photography



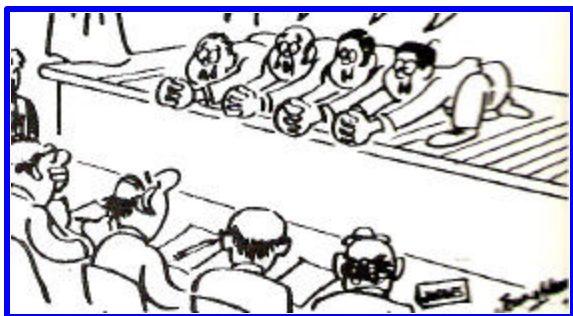
After Midnight took second place at district scoring an average of 75.1%. Members are (from L-R) Tom Matchinsky (tenor), David Bailey-Aldrich (lead), Steve McDonald (bass), Jim Emery (bari)



Another new GNU quartet, **Men at Work**, did well placing 9th in the contest. Members are (clockwise from lower left) Jim Barloon (bass), Loring Harrop (bari), Bruce Stasch (tenor), Steve Hardy (lead)



Special Alliance sang well coming in 13th this year. Members are (from L-R) Doug Miller (bari), Glenn Arons on (lead), Lance Johnson (bass), Dave Wall (tenor)



From the Judges Pit

The Great Northern Union is very fortunate to count 9 judges among our members. Through this column, we will get advice from these experts on how to improve our individual performance.

GNU Brothers;

As a newly re-certified Presentation Judge, it's always interesting to see your brother judges in action. At category school, we spend lots of time on our evaluation skills and the biggest challenge is the evaluation of A+ chorus's and quartets. We know they didn't get there by accident, we know they have great direction and coaching, we know that above all other competitors we judge, that they want that nugget from us that might add a point or 2 to their already great score the next time around.



It was with that in mind that I watched and listened to our evaluations in Appleton 2 weeks ago. 1st, it was great that so many chorus members stayed to hear what they had to say. 2nd, the learning curve went up immediately as you all heard first hand what their scores were all about. I don't believe in my 13 years with the GNU that everyone in the chorus has been invited before and it should be common place at every contest.

I really enjoy the evaluation part of judging and get fired up every time I see a full chorus in the seats. If I happen to say something that makes sense (most of them aren't Norsk) than I know the Director and Music team will have a better night at the next rehearsal.

We all saw the tape last week and perhaps saw or heard something that helped us understand what the judges

heard (except for Chuck Lower). We all can agree that it wasn't our A+ shot, but darn good, and we can now move ahead to a consistent 90 score.

Remember the emphasis on membership in the coming weeks and months and remember what Rod Johnson said Thursday night. It's everyone's job to bring in new members!

Judd Orff
Presentation Judge and proud member of the GNU!



The chorus presented Pete with a cake for his 35th birthday. It was the least we could do since his birthday landed on a rehearsal night. Thanks for your dedication, Pete.



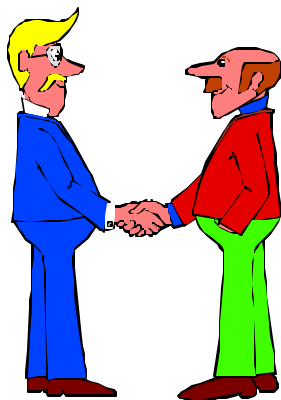
Thanks go to Corey Hanson for his hard work on the hotel reservations for the chorus. The choice of hotel and it's location were awesome. What a treat to have a quiet hotel with plenty of parking, conveniently located off the highway yet near plenty of restaurants!! Darn fine job!!!

A word from Don Knecht Membership VP

Mark Hale, a gold medal director and one of the judges at the District wrote this to our chorus. "Your subtle but meaningful lyric treatment in the ballad is unique and inspiring. The way you shape your phrases, building toward a single and emotional musical climax is in my view the BEST in the BHS (present company included, darn it)." After our triumph at District and his description of our way of singing a phrase as the "best in the BHS", can there be no doubt that we are within striking distance of the being the overall best? Pete agrees with Mark in saying that we need to gain members in order to put it over. Now let's set our sights on getting 90 to 100 members ready to sing in Salt Lake City. To do this we will need to have them on board and in the model by March.



Our Membership Task Force is now formulating plans to gain that goal. I am soliciting any and all ideas from all of you to help us become a 90+ chorus by March. I also invite all members who will help by joining the on going Membership Committee to email me. This includes members who have not been singing but will pitch in now.



Isn't singing one of the greatest experiences in life? Perhaps, at times, it feels like life itself. I have always felt that way about it. Whether at church, when tears come to your eyes as you sing a favorite hymn, or when you sing with your family. But for the most thrilling singing nothing beats the sound of 60 guys and a great ballad. Except that the sound of 90+ men singing just as

well, will be a bigger thrill for us and for our 20 or 30 new members. This is one way we can expand our sound and deliver more "Fun Through Musical Excellence", as our old slogan says.

When men visit us for the first time they comment on the level of commitment of each person in the Chorus. A commitment which says "All it takes is all you've got", as Jim Lutz has been telling us. Let's have no doubt in any visitor's mind that we have that commitment.

The thrill of the standing ovation at the District Contest said that we not only impressed the judges, but we wowed our audience. And in turn we were rewarded with knowing that we had given our all and it was worth it.

Let's keep the chords going and growing and be ready to perform for all our audiences like that. As we do there will be no limit to the excitement we will create every time we perform and to what we will accomplish in Salt Lake City next summer.

Don dknecht@mn.rr.com

Experienced voice teacher has several openings available in her studio.

Ann Schoenecker (Marty Monson's sister) grew up in a family of barbershop singers, has a Master of Music degree in vocal performance and is an experienced voice teacher in



many genres of music. Her studio is within 10 minutes of UMCP, in South Minneapolis. Yes she's worked with Marty in the past, but couldn't do anything about his laugh. Flexible scheduling is available. Please call Ann at **612-824-7154** for more information.



ICE! performed for us shortly before our district competition as they got ready for the Sweet Adelines International quartet contest. They placed 15th which guarantees them a spot in next year's international competition.

Meet Corey Hanson



Members: Get to know "em

Although Corey has lived in Mason City, Bloomington, Edina, and Golden Valley, he currently lives in Burnsville. His parents are Duane and Leone Hanson from Lake Mills, Iowa. They still live on the grandfather's farm with brother, Mike. Corey also has a sister in Tripoli, Iowa. The

whole family sings; and his dad plays guitar while mom plays piano and harpsichord! (Move over, Mozart!) Corey has sung in school and church; and had lessons as a young man.

For quartet experience, he has sung in two of them: the "Volkmen", and also "Rhythm and Smooze". Other members in those groups included Dan Erlandson, Greg Elstad, Jeff Hickmann; Chuck McKown, Bruce Watson, and Bob Barnes. Corey would love to fit in another quartet soon.



While he is presently supporting himself by cashiering at Target, he is working on his Bachelor's Degree in Interior Design.

About his GNU experience, Corey says the following: "I wanted to be in the best chorus and was told about GNU from my Mason City chorus friends, with whom he had sung since 1991. (He joined GNU in 1994.) I would tell any new guy, that GNU is like a family that likes to work hard, get things done, and loves the rewards of making people feel really good and happy."

"I would have to say that there are three really memorable moments during my time in the Great Northern Union", he says. "The first time was in Miami; after we got done singing, it was incredible." The second was Kansas City. I had the privilege of having my brother in the audience. and I just remember that I wanted to do my best for him. It was his first International contest and I wanted to make it memorable. When we finished singing, I knew we had done that for him. And when I saw him, he said he was so proud of me, and we both cried and hugged. He still talks about that moment today. The third is when we sang the National Anthem with the two guys from New York City; and the flag from the Twin Towers.

As for chapter offices, Corey enjoyed the privilege of being secretary for 3 years, but had to give it up when he returned to school.

In closing, Corey says "I would like to say that I am glad I came back after 3 month's leave; I am honored to be a member of GNU. I love each and every one of you; and I think of you as a brother."

Meet Bob Brutsman

'Anybody remember those four red tuxedos named "Talk of the Town"? Read on and you'll get to know one of it's members.

Today, one of our featured members is Bob Brutsman. He and his wife, Ellen; live in Golden Valley. They have two lovely daughters, Kristine who lives in downtown Chicago, and Janet, who lives in Madison, WI.

Bob was raised in Traer, Iowa. He graduated from Iowa State University with a degree in Chemical Engineering. He has worked for General Mills ever since college. Through transfers within General Mills, Bob has lived in Toledo, Ohio, Cedar Rapids, Iowa and in Minneapolis. Currently he is a Contractor manager for "GM", which involves negotiating contracts and administering business relationships with other manufacturers to make products for "GM". He often travels extensively, to exotic places like Cairo, Egypt.



Bob has been a barbershopper since he joined Toledo's group in 1969. He has also sung with Cedar Rapids; the Minneapolis Commodores, and now, GNU. He has sung bass in several quartets over the years with **Talk of the Town** being the .most successful. **Talk of the Town** was the 1976 LOL District Champs; and included GNU members Judd Orff, Keith Fransen, and Jim Hall.

In addition to holding all chapter officer positions, Bob has been LOL 10,000 Lakes VP, LOL Secretary, LOL Executive VP, and LOL Membership Services VP. He was LOL District President in 1999 and 2000, and LOL District Barbershopper of the Year in 2002. Currently he is the Society District Board Member, representing Land O' Lakes and Pioneer Districts.

Suffice it to say that it is easy to see why he deserved to be the District Barbershopper of that Year and why we are proud to call him one of our own.

The Great Northern Union received several emails regarding our performance in Appleton. Here are a few of the comments.

Congratulations on your fine win in Appleton last Saturday. It sounds like you are on a roll!! I talked to Mark Hale at our Wednesday rehearsal and he had very good things to say about your performance. He thinks you are definitely in the running for a top-five spot in Salt Lake City. Adding a few more voices, he thought, would make that even more likely. He praised your performance in front of our chorus and said we weren't the only ones who are using "the model" to their advantage. It is good to see that you are settling in with Pete and I know Mark has high regard for his talents. I look forward to seeing all of my GNU buddies next July and that you will be representing LOL rather than being involved in the "playoffs". Please say hi to everyone and congratulate them for me!

Dave Goodwin

(Dave is a "retired and moved away" GNU bass, living in southern California, carpooling something like 100 miles one way to sing with the Masters of Harmony)

My first contest on the risers with the GNU was the fall of 1998. That was special because it was my first. Similarly, my first Internationals in Atlanta were memorable. But, this was the most fun I have had on the risers in any contest since I joined. The audience reaction grabbed my heart and ripped it clean out of my chest and left me breathless. Let's do it again, but even better. The video of our performance told me a lot. If we can score upper 80's with that, then we can surely get into the 90's! Let's do it, guys!



John Babbs

To the wonderful members of GNU:

As you likely know, I have accepted a position in Detroit Lakes, Minnesota as an agent for State Farm. In addition to my new geographic limitations, my work schedule is going to be pretty intense.

While I'd love to be fully participating with the newly energized GNU, it is likely you won't see me at rehearsal again for quite some time, if ever.

I'd just like to thank you all for making me feel so welcome in the chorus and for putting in the effort that

led to our memorable performance on Saturday. It will no doubt take an even greater commitment to ride this magic into Salt Lake City. But in my short time with you all, I've learned that you are capable of amazing things. Good luck and thanks to you all. Here's hoping that something unexpected happens and I can join you again real soon.

Brent Gerber


I can't tell you how proud I am of each and every one of you. It's Tuesday, and I'm still getting goose bumps thinking about your performance on Saturday.

What a thrill it was for me to be in the audience to see a breakthrough performance for the GNU. You may not even realize it yet, but there was a level of freedom and vulnerability to your movements and singing that hasn't been there before in a contest. The moves at the beginning of the chorus of "Choo-Choo" just POPPED, and yet they were smooth and strong. It was wonderful to be out in the audience, being so caught up in your performance that I couldn't help but hum along (until Lisa Kvigne elbowed me in the ribs). My only regret was that I couldn't be on stage with you, to share in an experience that must have been transcendent. I'll do my best to be with you in Salt Lake City.



Thanks guys, for working so hard and for being willing to be bigger than life on stage. Keep it up, and ride this momentum to even greater heights. Keep believing in how good you are, and then trust that you can be even better.

David Bailey-Aldrich
AKA - Opera Boy



Special Thanks
to the Croix Chordsmen from the St. Croix Valley chapter for sharing our hospitality suite at District. And congratulations on being the most improved chorus this year!

Gentlemen,

Please read the following message from Mark Hale, lead of Michigan Jake, 2001 International Champs and current director of the Masters of Harmony Gold Medal chorus from CA. and one of our favorite coaches.

Inspiring? Challenging? You be the judge. PETE

Hi Pete,

I can hardly describe how impressed I was with the GNU's recent performance. I have been a big fan of your chorus since 1990 and you all have provided many wonderful



moments through the years. Your performance last Saturday was your overall best though and for some very specific reasons. Your subtle but meaningful lyric treatment in the ballad is unique and inspiring. The way you shape your phrases, building toward a single and emotional musical climax is in my view the BEST in the BHS (present company included, darn it). Delivering that level of musicality is a two way street, involving both conception and communication between you and the troops, and whatever you're doing is working! The uptune is extremely up-to-date sounding and distinctive, with choreography fitting of a champion chorus (and quite a bit more challenging than I've witnessed from you all in the past.) Your handling of it is excellent, although for it to reach the level of impact you're going to need for the biggest numbers the men are going to have to attain a higher level of commitment to the whole performance than ever before. You're fortunate that the plan is in place now with only improvements needed. If you all truly want to reach your highest scores/placement ever, you have a few critical challenges in front of you:

1) Members -- although it's not necessary to have large numbers to get medals, the formula for success (# of singers x talent level x time to prepare = level of success) is improved with larger numbers. With the uptune and accompanying choreography plan you have chosen, having a solid base of singers on the risers will allow the front row to work their physical magic without adversely affecting the quality of the singing. In order for this to work in your advantage, you must get superstars (those who have a great deal of experience, especially high level quartet experience) to sign on (they may want to come on board late which is your call) plus some more average singers who are willing to work hard and come aboard earlier. Set your goal for 90+. If you can

go over 100 you will be a force to reckon with.

2) Commitment -- Probably the two choruses with the highest level of commitment in the Barbershop Harmony Society are the Vocal Majority and Masters of Harmony. That speaks volumes. We average 92% attendance over the course of a year and panic if the level ever goes below 90%. I've had as my mantra since I moved to California that in order for us to achieve success together we must share three things: ATTENDANCE, ATTENTION and TRUST. Everything comes out of those three. The amount of commitment is directly proportional to the quality of the performance in almost every case.

3) Hard work -- Be ready to go the extra mile. Those long weekend rehearsals after going through the uptune for the 15th time can be a drudge or a thrill but it's definitely tiring. Everyone must get in shape, both vocally and physically. They must keep going back to that well of energy without a single complaint. You can bet there are others working just as hard and frankly, you hope they do. The best thing about hard work is that the harder you work to reach a goal, the sweeter the payoff is. And the stronger your organization becomes. Never let the guys forget WHERE the contest is won...in the rehearsal hall, sometime between now and June.

This got longer than I was planning so I'll close by saying that the Great Northern Union has had its share of ups and downs, but there is an opportunity RIGHT NOW to take a big step forward and become one of the powerhouse choruses of the BHS. It is up to your guys to determine if they have what it takes to make it happen. It CANNOT happen with just a little hard work in June. It MUST be a part of the culture of the organization, witnessed from the first moment a guest steps on the risers. The time to make it happen is now.

Make sure to pick your coaches carefully but do be willing to get several expert ears to weigh in, especially those who are experts in motivation. This allows you to monitor if there are things creeping in you're not aware of (can't see the forest...) and move the men toward success. Looking forward to seeing you again soon.

Best regards,
Mark



Many of you know that after Roger Williams' resignation, we sat down and made a "wish list" of directors that we'd like to work with the GNU. They included names like Mark Hale, Jim Henry, Greg Clancy...and Pete Benson. Well, you know the story, and we were fortunate enough to attract one of the men on our original short list. Especially after this weekend, I'm confident that we all agree it was indeed the right choice.



Through two years of hard work, determination, and an unwillingness to accept less than we're capable of, Pete has brought us back to the top of the LOL District. He has redefined the sound, style, and image of the GNU. And I can assure you, he's just getting started. Judges and audience members alike couldn't help but comment about the ballad. We all know that ballads can win contests, but uptunes win shows. To win an audience with a ballad is truly a testament to this chorus and our leader.

The comments made during the judges' evaluation sessions make it evident that we are moving in the right direction. Mark Hale's comment that we shape phrases better than almost anyone...ever, gave me chills. Each of us contributed to a marvelously musical, emotional, and exciting performance. But we all know that the music that we make comes from the mind, hands, and heart of the man who leads us. Happy Birthday Pete--hope you liked your present. It is an honor and a privilege to share the risers with you.

Scott Kvigne

What a THRILL on Saturday! This was my first district-winning appearance with GNU since joining in Spring of 2002. With my near-center 5th row vantage point, I could see the energy and enthusiasm of those ahead of me and it invigorated me even more! I can't wait to watch the video of our set to see and hear what the audience received. I have enjoyed seeing the faces of Erik & Tony as they head back towards the chorus just before the Tag!



Thanks to every GNU member on stage for their contributions to successfully reclaiming the District Championship! Special thanks to Pete for all his

leadership talents (and driving skills) in challenging us to do our best, individually and as a choral unit. Thanks to Scott for all his time, efforts, and dedication in leading mirror and early bird sessions. Thanks to Roger for his work in helping us "be in the moment" with the words of each song. Thanks to Eric & Marty for their leadership roles in the Performance Team. Thanks also to Kent Erlandson and everyone else who helped in ANYWAY in making this a memorable weekend. I also want to thank the GNU leadership for encouraging the membership to sit in on the evaluations. I felt it was a very valuable learning experience for me and hopefully for everyone else who sat in. We received praise for the many things GNU did well, as well as some constructive criticism of what GNU needs to do to polish up our performance for International in Salt Lake City.

The key word I came away with from the evaluations is **COMMITMENT!** (We NEVER heard that before ;-)
Commitment to every aspect of our performance, which is MUCH more than anything Pete, Scott, Mark, or anyone else directing can extract from us. It requires each one of us to be FULLY ENGAGED in the song, living the story, and sharing our emotions with the audience. We are musical storytellers, and we MUST make each song's story our own. I know from sharing my life experiences with many of you over the last 2 years that we ALL have individual experiences we can relate to! Once again we have been told how great GNU is at performing ballads. I think this is a special talent/gift GNU has. I KNOW that with COMMITMENT, GNU can replicate the same emotional delivery, using *Exaltation and Soaring*, to bring home another MEDAL from Salt Lake City!

A fellow Champ!
Steve Nolte

A **HUGE** thank you goes to **Mike and Kathy Franssen** for handling the hospitality room, riser transportation, loading, unloading, etc etc for the trip to Appleton.

Mike, Kathy, and Ken Slinde along with Kent and Maria Erlandson were the only folks to show up at 7pm at the UMCoP on Sunday evening to unload 18 sets of risers, set up the ones for rehearsal and to load the other ones (9 sets) into the trailer for our future use.

Bruce Stasch
Steve Hardy

Loring Harrop
Jim Barloon

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Support these
GNU
quartets!



The Great Northern Union Chorus meets every Thursday from 7:00pm to 10:00pm, at the United Methodist Church of Peace, 6345 Xerxes Ave S, Richfield MN 55423

“Early-Bird” rehearsals are held at 6:00pm for practicing choreography. Members are urged to call the GNU Hotline at 763-476-7383 weekly for the latest word on rehearsals, performances, and other pertinent information. Also find us on the web at www.gnunion.com