

**President's Report – Spring HOD 2026**

Dear Illinois District,

There's a reason the rearview mirror is small and the windshield is large: the past is important to glance at, but our focus should always be on what's ahead. While 2025 was a strong year, it wasn't without its challenges—and that's okay. What matters now is learning from our missed opportunities and moving confidently into 2026.

This year has already brought a few unexpected changes. First, I want to extend my sincere thanks to our Immediate Past President and Contest & Judging Vice President, **Terry Ludwig**, for his many years of dedicated service to the district. Due to personal circumstances, Terry has stepped down from all board positions.

In response, the board has appointed **Brett Mulford**, District President from 2019–2020, to serve as Immediate Past President for the remainder of 2026. Additionally, the board has appointed me to take on the role of **Contest & Judging Vice President**, and I have accepted that responsibility.

One area where we recognize a missed opportunity is in our convention schedule and the competitor registration process. To better support participation—both in convention programming and in chorus/quartet performances—we are proposing a revised schedule. A tentative version is included in the HOD Packet for your review.

In my New Year message, I shared that *“2026 is the Year of the Fire Horse, symbolizing passion, freedom, and innovation.”* I hope we all embrace that spirit. Let's be willing to explore new ideas, try new approaches, and offer honest feedback—positive or constructive—so we can continue to grow as a district.

Yours in Harmony,

Ben Dirks

Illinois District President