

To: Illinois Board of Directors  
Illinois House of Delegates

From: Terry Ludwig, President

The first few months of my term have been an absolute whirlwind. So much going on in the District and I am honored to be serving all of you! I have told every chapter that I have visited the same thing- We work for you! Let me bring you up to date on some of the things happening in Illinois.

## **CHAPTER VISITS**

At the writing of this report we have visited 7 chapters (Peoria, West Towns, Bloomington, Macomb, Danville, Waterloo and Carbondale) and contacted 2 others (Champaign/Urbana and Rock Island) for a total of 9. I found the visits to be very informative and it was great to meet new people and renew old friendships. I have attached all of the reports from each of those visits to the end of this report. By the end of the year the Board will have visited every chapter and hopefully let all of you know that we care and want you to be a part of this great district.

The 2 chapters that we contacted and did not visit is because they either have no current members or they have 1 member that we cannot reach. My fear is that we will have to eliminate those chapters from our rolls.

## **CONVENTION**

I have had meetings and discussion with a small committee that we put together to look at our fall convention. We are looking at ways to get more singing in during the weekend and have come up with a few ideas that we are going to try/bring back this fall. The goal is to get more people singing during the weekend and participating in this great hobby.

First of all, we are going to switch the Chorus Contest and the Quartet Finals. The Chorus Contest will take place at 1pm on Saturday and the Quartet Finals will take place at 7pm. To go along with that, immediately after the Quartet Finals we will ask every to adjourn to the Doubletree Hotel ballroom where we will bring the President's/QCA reception. It is there that we will announce the results of the quartet contest!

On Saturday morning we are going to offer some singing and learning opportunities. Sing With A Champ is making a return and it will be hosted by the QCA. Come sing with some of your past champs and have a great time!

Also on Saturday morning we are going to start the Illinois District Barber Polecat Program which will also be run by the QCA. If you decide to participate you will get a pin that we are having designed that will identify you as a participant. You can come in by yourself, with a friend, with a quartet...your choice. We will have QCA members there to fill out whatever part is needed. You sing a polecat of your choice and it gets marked off. When you get all 12 marked off on a part then you will get a COMPLETION pin. You do not have to do all the songs at this convention. We will run this room for a number of conventions so you can do a couple each year if you wish! We will be using the ORIGINAL Polecat book.

If you are looking for something completely different on Saturday morning we are bringing back the SMAG Contest! Saturday Morning Anything Goes! Come with whatever ensemble you want (duets, trio, quartet...more) and sing anything you want. Our esteemed judging panel will pick a winner and you will be awarded the coveted SMAG medal!

For the education part of the convention we are going to offer 1 class. The subject is Grant Writing and Promoting a Culture of Philanthropy in your chapter. I hope someone from every chapter will attend this great and informative class.

I think that just about does it for now. The Board is working hard and hopefully over the next few months we will have even more to reveal. It is an exciting time to be an Illinois District Barbershopper!

Respectfully Submitted,  
Terry Ludwig  
President

Visit to the Peoria chapter:

Attendance: 10

Chapter Type: Male

Average age: between 75 and 80

here are the topics we discussed

- Bottom up governance. We talked about how BHS over the last 10-15 years has really become a "top down" organization and that my goal was to change that at the District level. We serve YOU and not the other way around. The District Board is here to help..

- Their major concern was membership. We discussed the fact that the Peoria area is more than big enough to support a viable chapter. They need to find what makes them special and market the heck out of that. I also had a discussion after rehearsal about this subject with the director. He is a talented young man who is plugged into the music community in Peoria and surrounding areas. He said he would invite friends to come but he knows they may come one time and then not come back. I gave him an idea to approach some of his friends and tell them that he "wanted to build something with this chapter" and that "he needed their help". Maybe by giving them some ownership in the project he might be able to get some of them to commit long term. I also suggested they reach out to Jeff McMorris from the Danville chapter about his presentation and to reach out to Doug Finkbiner to ask for some help and ideas. Doug, would you please reach out to the Peoria Chapter President. His name is Mike Cosner and his email is coz3217@yahoo.com. Please let me know when you have accomplished this task.

-I challenged the chapter to come to contest! I told them they did not have to actually compete if they did not feel comfortable, but that they could sing for evaluation and their scores would not be published. The director was ALL FOR THIS! They may not have 12 guys but I think if they sing for eval it doesn't really matter (please weigh in on this Mr Lathom). So it sounds like we may have a chapter that hasn't been to contest in a number of years come this year!

- we discussed contest. One of the comments was from a long time member. He said that when he was going to the convention regularly he would feel comfortable pulling some guys aside and singing a tag or polecat. He said in recent years he has felt alienated. The tags and songs being sung are not ones that he could ever sing. There seems to be a lack of singing opportunities for the average singer. Whether this is an accurate observation or not it is, at the very least, an observation that deserves to be looked at. What can we do to provide singing opportunities for the average singer?

-Another question was "why should I even be a member of BHS?" My answer was- because you get me showing up to your meeting and wanting to help! This question has been around for a long time. What benefit does a member get for his/her money? I would like to make this a topic of discussion at our next Board Meeting.

- a good discussion about EIH. They asked me about EIH and what was happening across the District. They currently are a Male chapter and I told them that was absolutely their decision to make. I also told them that some small chapters are finding success by inviting Women to join. That may be a topic they visit as a board in upcoming meetings.

- They are working on the Polecats as a chorus. The director asked if the BHS Barber Polecat Program was still a thing. I told him I was unsure. I then came up with the thought that maybe we could do a District Barber Polecat program. Could we use this program to help solve the singing opportunities for average singers question???

- I closed by letting them know I am only an email away. I/we are here to help.

I can tell you that this visit was one of the most rewarding barbershop experiences I have ever had. These guys were happy to have someone who cared show up. It made me even more resolved to make sure all the chapters get to see us this year!

## Ben Dirks and I visited the West Towns Chorus on 2/6

30 Singers in attendance

Average age was around 55

Nice influx of new/younger members

Had the opportunity to address the chapter and here is a summary of the topics discussed:

- 1) They are curious (as was Peoria) to hear what the other chapters have to say. This tells me we will need to publish all of these summaries once we have completed the visits.
- 2) Talked about the need for more singing opportunities at the convention. I expressed my opinion that we need to make this a priority.
- 3) We talked about EIH and how some chapters, especially smaller ones, were having success by becoming mixed.
- 4) An idea was floated by a member to have some "regional" chapter get-togethers. I thought it was a great idea and told him that that should probably be done on a local level by the district would be glad to offer any support we can.
- 5) I told them that we are here to help. We are here to work for them and not the other way around. We only can help when we know they need something so please ask!
- 6) This was the day the announcement came out about the sale of Harmony Hall. There were a few questions and we answered them the best we could.
- 7) we talked about membership. I emphasized that the best way to grow is to define what makes you different from all the other singing organizations in your area. Clearly define what is special about you and market the heck out of that. There are hundreds of places for people to sing...why you?
- 8) Talked about membership numbers across BHS
- 9) There was a question about COTS. We let them know that there was one in January and that plans are underway for 2024. John- you may want to touch base with the WTC president and make sure they get the dates and a personal invitation when dates are set for next year.

We also met with the board and here are some topics that were discussed.

- 1) They want to start a YIH festival. I told them that Evan Patrick is the one to talk to. We discussed cost and ways to pay for it such as grants. We may want to put together a database of available grants through the state that chapters could apply for.
- 2) They were curious about starting relationships with schools. I told them that it is a process and requires patience and determination. Music Educators are very protective of their programs. You have to gain their trust and let them know you are there to HELP and not poach the kids. Maybe the best

place to start is with some struggling programs. Offer your HELP.

3) one of the biggest struggles of the chapter is finding venues for annual and Christmas shows. Jeff Bowyer- is there any advice or guidance you could offer them in negotiating for these venues?

4) interested in some kind of grant writing workshop. Maybe this is something we could do during the convention weekend??? Like Friday after the HOD???

5) How do you get more people to help? We ask for volunteers and people don't raise their hands. My suggestion is to ask personally! if we ask people in a group to "volunteer" chances are they will sit on their hands. I believe you will have much better luck going up to someone one on one and asking for a very specific task.

That pretty much sums it up. Had a great time!

A lot of you have asked for an "outline" of what to cover during a chapter visit. Here are a few bullet points to cover and then let them ask questions. You never know what might be important to them!

- Please get a count of the number of people at the meeting
- Please give an estimate of the average age

- Terry made a promise that someone from the board would visit every chapter and you are here to fulfill that promise.

- The board is here to work for YOU. We want to help so please ask and if we don't have the answer we will get it.

- The main focus of Terry's presidency is to bring back the singing/fun at the conventions. It has been missing!

- encourage any chapter that has not competed recently to come. There is always an option to sing "for evaluation" where the score is not published but you still get evaluation.

- remind them that there is a bigger barbershop world out there and we want them to be a part of it! There are hundreds of people in the district who want to sing with them and get to know them!

after that just let the conversation flow naturally. They will tell you what is important to them. Answer their questions to the best of your ability and be honest.

The whole point of this is not to talk AT them, but talk WITH them. They want to feel like they are being heard and someone is paying attention.

after the visit make sure you send a recap to the entire board so we can see what you talked about and if any of us have any action items to address. I will include ALL of these recaps in my report to the HOD in the spring and in the fall.

## Danville Chapter

Visit 36 singers and 1 director in attendance  
average age around 55

Jeff Bowyer and I met with the board prior to the rehearsal. Had a very productive meeting.

Topics; – Told them how impressed I am with the chapter. They are very involved in the community and the membership is stable and growing. This is a chapter that should be celebrated by the District and held up as an example of what is possible.

- Discussed why they have not been to contest. There was a very frank conversation about the fact that they have felt forgotten and unappreciated. I hope that our presence there shows them that they ARE valued. They are not opposed to the idea of contest and will discuss it as a chapter. Even if they do not come to compete or sing for eval I think we will see a number of them in attendance.
- – Asked them to please have someone come to the HOD
- – Here some concerns about membership renewal with BHS and that they can't seem to get answers. I took some notes and will be sending an email to BHS to see if I can help.
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- During the chapter meeting:
  - – taught them a tag
  - – told them how much I really appreciate what they have been doing as a chapter
  - – emphasized that we work for them
  - – told them to contact me if they need anything This is a VERY healthy chapter. They are doing so many great things and many chapters could learn from them. I really look forward to fostering a better relationship between this chapter and the district.

## Macomb Chapter

Visit 9 singers and 1 Director in attendance

Average age about 60

- The District is here to work for you.
- – Discussed the upcoming fall convention and talked about the changes There is a bigger world to Barbershop than just your chapter
- – More singing opportunities – QCA involvement – Grant Writing class – talked about the senior chorus – What would you like to see in director classes-they are supposed to get back to me on this
- – How can we help? After rehearsal I talked with the board about membership. This, obviously, is their major concern. We talked about the program in Pioneer District where they are paying college students to come sing with the chorus for a semester. They seemed interested in the concept. We also discussed coming to Fall Contest and singing for eval only. Told them that maybe they could contact another chapter and put the choruses together. My overall impression was that for 9 singers they really sang pretty well! They would benefit from more members but the quality is high for a small chapter. Many long time barbershoppers and a couple new ones.

## Report on a Visit to Kaskaskia Trail Chorus in Waterloo, IL

March 2, 2023

By Doug Finkbiner

The Kaskaskia Trails Chorus is a small group that has found success in actively taking part in the local arts scene. They are apparently well-known for singing the national anthem at local events and for

supporting charitable and arts organizations. Observations are bulleted below.

- The chorus had 18 members present Thursday evening (only two tenors were missing), which is normal attendance.

- The group came back strong after the pandemic with membership staying about the same.

- The group performs many sing outs, including during church services.

- They perform an annual fall show in November, which serves as their major fundraiser. They

also operate a food stand at the county fair and other events.

- When I asked them what the district board can do for them, they wanted to know if we can help

them draw younger members (they have no members under 50).

- They were discussing taking part in a school offered by the Area Council.

- Periodically, they bring in a clinician to work with the chorus and provide opportunities for

teachers and students from area school music programs to take part.

- The Kaskaskia Trail Chorus often invites high school ensembles to sing on their annual shows.

- The chapter is very active in its community and seems satisfied with its current level of

participation. They don't appear to be interested in competing at the district level, even though

there may be interest in <collaboration= in district activities in the future.

Observations: Waterloo is a very active chapter with a love of singing barbershop harmony and actively

participating in community events. Both of these factors lead me to a conclude that this is a healthy

chapter and an important part of our district. I look forward to visiting them again and encouraging

them to become more active in district functions



## Report on a visit to Little Egypt Chorus in Carbondale, IL

March 7, 2023

By Doug Finkbiner

I visited the Carbondale Chapter on Tuesday evening at their rehearsal site in the Carbondale High

School Music Room. About a dozen members were present with a fairly equal distribution of voice parts.

Further information is bulleted below:

- The Little Egypt Chorus sings in the extended Carbondale area and were preparing a sing-out at

an Irish festival in Murphysboro, IL.

- They reviewed their repertoire and sang through a new song in their preparation.

- The chorus will have their annual show, which serves as their primary fundraiser, in October.

They are currently looking for a new, larger venue.

- Per usual, I asked what the district can do for them, and they answered that they feel as though

the Society's offerings at Harmony University is <over the heads= of their members. They said

the Society is <passing them by.= I have requested a list of suggestions about what topics will

interest smaller chapters.

- The chorus sings out about six times a year.

- Spitfire, a quartet affiliated with the Ambassadors of Harmony were their guest quartet last

October.

- Since returning after the pandemic, the chorus has had steady attendance. The chapter

president, David Bremer, said they only lost one or two guys since the beginning of the lockdown.

- They have reached out to local colleges, but there doesn't seemed to be much interest in

collaboration.

- On last year's show, a local high school a Capella group appeared on the Little Egypt show.

- President Bremer said they would like to bring in a clinician and invite local school choirs to take

part. I told him the district may be able to help with that.

- Some members of the chorus have participated in district events in the past, and I told them I

will keep them updated on future district activities.