



September 1, 2012

To: Barbershop Harmony Society Leadership

From: Alan Lamson, Society President

Greetings to my brother Barbershoppers,

For those of you serving your second year, and maybe even your first year, as a chapter or district president or officer, I am sure you will agree with me when I say how fast the past 20 months have flown by. It is hard to believe that this will be my last greeting to you as Society President at your House of Delegates meeting. It seems like only yesterday when I wrote the first one for the spring of 2011. But it has been a busy time and it has been a wonderful opportunity for me to serve each of you as the Society Board deliberated policy, setting aims for the Society, and making decisions that could affect each one of you in the same way that we, also really just members of a local chapter, will be affected. But the good news is that I will have two more years to serve you and work under the guidance of our next Society President, Shannon Elswick of the Sunshine District. I know that we are in good hands for those years.

Looking back it is interesting to see what we have accomplished and what we have initiated. Clearly, one of the most important tasks of any Board of Directors is the selection, election, and support of the Chief Executive Officer of the organization. We have been doing that since the end of March 2011 when Ed Watson informed us that he would be retiring in July of 2011. It was an opportunity for us as policy makers to rethink where we wanted this great organization to go in the next decade and decide what type of professional leader we wanted to take us there. We were clear on that direction. We were unanimous on that direction. We also agreed that we would do whatever it took to get us to that person and not just be satisfied with settling for the best available person. It took two search efforts. It took receiving and reviewing nearly 90 professional resumes. It took two dozen telephone and face-to-face interviews. It took hundreds of hours of time from members on the two search committees who worked tirelessly to get us to the personality, experience, and leadership that we wanted. But we got there. And you have received your first House of Delegates message from that new Chief Executive Officer/Executive Director, Marty Monson.

We kicked off Operation Harold Hill at the beginning of 2012 after seven months of planning in 2011. The effort was to have a Society-wide focus on membership recruitment – new members and getting some of our former members to return. Nearly 60% of our chapters have signed up to participate in Operation Harold Hill. We knew we would not get them all. There are many small chapters, probably those that need the help the most, who just can't or won't sign up. There are many chapters who are doing very well with membership, thank you very much, even before Operation Harold Hill and don't want to use up our resources needlessly. There are probably some, believe it or not, who don't even know about the program.

But while we have been addressing the implementation and results to date of Operation Harold Hill, we knew this was not a one and done program – a program that would end upon the arrival of a new calendar year. That is what happened to other membership programs in previous years. Will it change? Will it morph and look

different in another year? Probably, but the effort will still be there. It has already changed during 2012 at the hands of the Society Membership Committee. It became clear that membership recruitment was not the only issue to be solved. It was clearly identified that members were 'walking out the back door' as quickly (and more quickly) than we could bring them in the front door. So the Membership Committee developed the "Supercharging Your Chapter" program to provide a plan to help local chapters improve the retention of their existing members. We spend such great efforts to recruit new members, then ignore them and wonder why they leave before their first or second year of membership is over. Why would we not spend half the effort on retaining them that we do on recruiting them? So I urge each of you to adopt "Supercharging" or at least some program that specifically identifies ways to retain membership. And contrary to popular belief, the data indicates that the vast majority of those that leave are not doing so due to age. Seventy-five percent of the guys who leave are doing it because of something we have done, or not done, at our local chapters. Let's figure out quickly what we need to do in our chapters and for our chapters that is the right thing to do to improve retention and recruitment and make it a habit.

The Society Board has initiated some things that could be very exciting for our Society. They are all currently in the study phase with decisions to be made on many of them in the next three to six months. In summary, here is what we are studying and contemplating:

Global Strategy Task Force: We have ten affiliate organizations in other countries. Many of our members probably don't even know the extent of this global presence. Over the past several years there have been discussions about improving relationships with our affiliates and not just relying on meetings with them at our International Convention or occasional interface when a judge or staff member from the Society makes a trip to one of their conventions or a week of coaching. We feel that there are ways to get our organizations working closer together and that they can benefit from many things we do and we can certainly benefit from many things that they do. The Task Force will work to strengthen those relationships and educational opportunities.

Information Technology Policy Initiative: We have created a task force to develop a Society policy on the use of information technology. Our staff at headquarters is doing a great job with the limited resources that are provided to them. In many instances that places us on the backside of the wave of the future. And decisions regarding budgets and resources are not always made in a way that takes maximum advantage of the platform that a strong IT policy could provide. The results of this task force could change the way we conduct our business as a Society for years to come.

Mixed Harmony Affiliate: This task force is taking a hard look at what the Society can do to promote and encourage the formation, support and growth (including musical growth) of mixed harmony quartets. In the recent past there have been venues to allow such groups to perform – The Bolton Landing Festival and the Buckeye Invitational as two examples. But those opportunities have evaporated. And we have a lot of our members now singing in mixed harmony quartets. In many instances they are singing with their wives who may or may not be members of Sweet Adelines or Harmony Inc. There is little encouragement across the Society in providing coaching, educational opportunities and performance opportunities for these groups. If we want to create a larger umbrella that includes all people who love to sing barbershop, then certainly having an separate affiliate organization that would allow for these improvements would be beneficial to our own organization.

Foundations for a Lifetime of Harmony: Information has been provided to the board that indicates that there are nearly 2 ½ million home-schooled children in the United States and that curriculum for vocal music as part of their education is woefully limited and nearly non-existent. It was suggested that there is a great opportunity here for the Barbershop Harmony Society together with our sister organizations of Harmony, Inc. and Sweet Adelines International to step up and become the voice and source for vocal music education for these children and a major factor in the support of vocal music education in the United States. The Task Force was just recently formed and we anticipate some very exciting recommendations to come from the effort of this group. This is also a chance for the Society to do something that is external to our own members and our own organization and to have an impact in the lives of so many people in a selfless and altruistic action – in an area where I would daresay we have a huge amount of expertise.

These are exciting times for the Barbershop Harmony Society. The message is getting out loud and clear that membership is important. But the message is getting out also that we are an organization that can make a difference in people's lives, that can lift them up from their day to day worries, that can change our communities, and that can be the most relevant organization in our own community as a singing organization and as a community-minded organization.

We need to carry that message to every member of this Society. We need to carry that message back to our own chapters. We need to carry that message to everyone in our community with whom we come in contact. We need to believe that we are more than just a group of guys who enjoy singing and that we do matter.

Thanks for your efforts on behalf of all of us in the Barbershop Harmony Society.



...Music is Love is Music...