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**“Barbershop Competition”  
by  
Tom Holbrook**

**Theyyyy’re baaaack! The dreaded Love Bugs have returned for their semi-annual visit... actually, for those who remember my last column on them, they’ve actually been here all the time and are just waking up from a long winter’s nap. Up from the sod we walk on and doing their darndest to make our lives miserable for the next 4 to 5 weeks. One very important reminder... as they get on the front of your car don’t forget to wash them off quickly so their innards don’t eat the paint off. Also, don’t forget that all service areas on the FL Turnpike have automatic windshield washing stations you can pull through and get the bugs off your windshields while traveling.**

**I want to bring everybody up on the results of the Heart of Florida Barbershop Chorus’ trip to Jacksonville last weekend for the all-Florida, Sunshine District Spring Competition. 14 choruses from every nook and cranny in Florida competed, including us, and though we were the youngest chorus in years having been formed (our 5<sup>th</sup>), we were the oldest in average age (approx. 70,) and the largest in number singing. Of our 140+ members 86 stalwart souls put in the extra rehearsals required to prepare, and made the 2 ½ hour trek north to take on the mighty mouths of Tampa, Jacksonville, Sarasota, Miami, Ft. Lauderdale and the rest.**

**In addition to a total of 15 choruses who performed (Tampa was performing but not competing since they one last year’s competition,) there were also 20 quartets vying for District Champion.**

**Those choruses and quartets competing were shooting for the top prize of District Champion determining who will represent our area at the Barbershop Harmony Society’s International Competition to be held in July at Denver, CO. When the last pitch pipe had sounded and the curtain came down on the last chorus the panel of 6 judges found that The Heart of Florida guys finished 6<sup>th</sup> overall. For those who would like to hear the winning groups our chorus is sponsoring a benefit show on May 20<sup>th</sup>, at the Savannah Center that will feature the Tampa “Heralds of Harmony”, District Chorus Champions and several Championship quartets... all of whom will be recipients of the money raised to assist them in expenses for their trip to Denver, CO, for the International Competition. If you like Barbershop Music you’ll love this show so get your tickets now through The Villages Box Office.**

**Jacksonville was my first District Competition with this chorus... my last competition being 24 years ago in Roanoke, VA, with the Men of Greenbrier in the Mid-Atlantic Division. Whether it’s a person’s first or 41<sup>st</sup> competition appearance, however, the excitement is always there and the**

adrenaline still pumps as the chorus waits back stage for its name to be called and the curtains to rise.

As I looked around at our members, some requiring the assistance of canes, stools, chairs or railings to participate on the risers, they were all preparing their faces to “sell” the song when the downbeat came. I couldn’t help but wax nostalgic, imagining them in their previous choruses from literally all over the globe, wondering if their thoughts were similar to mine... where have all the years gone since my first step onto a Barbershop Chorus riser?

I was introduced to Barbershop music in 1961 and because I loved to sing, even at 21 years of age, I thought it was the greatest thing since sliced bread. Aaahhhh.... to go on a stage with a bunch of guys of various sizes, shapes and ages, and collectively warm the hearts of an audience by transporting their minds back to happier days and lifting burdens from their soul... “It just don’t get any better than that.” No greater good can anyone do than to make the lives of those around them better. Forty-six years later my voice is lower and a little shakier... my breathing a little shallower... my legs a little weaker... and my waist a little more noticeable but the joy remains as robust as ever when I see the smiles and hear the applause of those listening to the sounds coming from my mouth and those of my friends standing with me on the risers. Regardless of my age, I hope I shall never lose that feeling.

The average age of our chorus is higher than most because The Villages and surrounding areas have become a Mecca for retiring Barbershoppers. Though any man liking to sing is welcome, we are always especially on the lookout for a lot of you younger guys who would like to sing with a group that will not only be the largest chorus in Florida but the best. Remember, younger is anyone below the age of 60, and we promise you a lot of singing and a lot of fun. No organization can sustain and grow without “young blood.”

One of the highlights of a District Competition is to rub elbows with the best singers and to get the opportunity to sing with them in the hallways and dining rooms of the hotels in which everyone stays. I must say our last night on Saturday went until 2 am because a group consisting of me, Jerry, Pete, Frank and Frank couldn’t say no to anyone with a pitch pipe in his hand, as we sang one song tag after another. You, too, can be part of all this fun and frolic next year... just give us a call at 307-5634 and we’ll tell you how to give us at try.

One of the most “right-on” statements heard during the competition was this... “A little boy, after hearing his daddy sing Barbershop music, turned to his mother and said, ‘Mommy, I want to be a Barbershopper when I grow up.’ His mother promptly replied, ‘Honey, you know you can’t do both.’” How true, how true.

See you next week.