



The MVEer Monthly

May, 2013

The Top Event Spring Show at Pewaukee High School, 2 and 7:30pm on Saturday May 11th. "A Night to Remember," features 2012 SAI Quartet Champions Martini, High Point, The Nth Degree, and your favorite Land O' Lakes Championship Chorus, the **Midwest Vocal Express**. Tickets available at 888-240-4426.

Special Tribute Issue

Russ Foris, MVE Director
Announcements, Accolades, Testimonials,
and In His Own Words

The Unexpected Passing of an MVE

Giant: With every keystroke, it aches in my heart to inform you of the passing of Russ Foris, unexpectedly of a heart attack this morning. To put a synopsis on his influence not just on this chorus, but on the Society, would run me out of words and not scratch the surface. To try to capture what he meant to me personally (and many of you) would fall even more woefully short.

Uncle Russ came to us while working at Harmony Hall in 1991 (when it was in Kenosha). He was already a well-known arranger and coach, and had directed the women of the Village Vocal Chords of Harmony, Inc. to multiple gold medals. The early going was not easy, as we were not doing well as a chapter, sometimes seeing as few as 18 members at a performance. From there we began to build, and the chapter that we know today and all of our accomplishments and gifts to the audience followed.

Why did we grow under Russ? It was his total lack of ego in any way. He taught that YOU had to be the musician and own the music. From that came the much-lampooned, but beloved revolutionary concept of seeing how much of high-A performances we could deliver with zero or minimal direction.

Further, it did not have to be Russ at the front during rehearsals, and he *insisted* on the team teaching. I am forever indebted to him for allowing an early-twenty-something the opportunity to have the best musical laboratory in the world at my hands each week, with his

2012 Land O Lakes District Chorus Champions
Presents:
A Night to Remember!
MVE
MIDWEST VOCAL EXPRESS
www.MVE.org

With Special Guests
Martini
2012 SAI Quartet Champions

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Pewaukee High School Theater
510 Lake Street Pewaukee, WI 53072

General Admission \$18 & \$21
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firm and benevolent structure always guiding us to make sure we served the music first. I know there are other Pteam members who can claim the same appreciation.

Ultimately, we discovered our best performance style was one that told honest stories to the audience - often times humorous - but always with heart and truth. We grew not because of a cult of personality from one leader (as some choruses are lead), but because this great leader allowed and insisted that other diverse personalities grow and flourish in the group. It also allowed him to bring forth some of his most inspirational and brilliant arrangements.

We could all be better because we were free to bring the best of ourselves to each meeting.

With his retirement from the Society Staff and the chorus in 2003, he moved to Hot Springs Village, AR, with wife (Auntie N) Nancy and Daughter Joanna. There, he continued his work in the performance realm by stage managing at the local theater and coaching local groups.

When I last spoke with him in January, we talked for almost an hour about everything and nothing. He had great interest in how individuals young and old were fairing. He never stopped caring deeply for the guys.

He is to be cremated, after "all of his usable parts" are harvested for those who can use him (imagine finger creating fake mustache under nose while reading this). Nancy is insisted that there will be an afterglow and life celebration to follow, and we will share the details when that occurs.

How can we best remember Russ? By taking that responsibility he demanded from each of us and making more music from your spot on the risers than you ever thought possible. (Finger under nose) "Remember, YOU own the music. YOU have to be the one that internalizes it. It is not going to be ME. It has to be YOU!"

Somehow, I think it will be both. Please share this message with those who knew Russ and include them when we know more details.



With great love,
Mike Lietke *Email to Chorus as the first Announcement*

My dear friend Russ Foris passed away this morning. Russ was my mentor into barbershop chorus directing. He lead by example, expected the most from every man, and never needed the limelight. He was humble, talented, passionate, and

always a gentleman. While he had strong opinions, he never imposed his opinions on others, yet still had a knack for nudging them toward his opinion over time. He must be remembered for so very much: Director, Arranger, Father, True Friend...but I want to also give him the credit for being the original "stand aside" chorus director who influenced countless choruses to take a chance and give complete ownership to the men. Rest in Harmony Russ. We already miss you already. Nancy Foris, we love you and have you in our thoughts and prayers. – **Chris Peterson**, Former Director of the MVE as a Testimonial on Facebook

Barbershop lost a great man this morning. I could list his many talents, accomplishments, and things we learned from him. But if you knew Russ, you know he wouldn't take any of the credit. So I will just say - Thank you, Russ Foris, for everything you did for so many people. We love you. RIP – **Josh Umhoefer**, Director of the MVE as a Testimonial on Facebook

I am so sorry to learn that our dear Russ Foris is no longer with us. What a remarkable person he was! He was totally devoted to his work: as a high school music teacher; as a valued employee of the barbershop harmony society; as a director of Midwest Vocal Express; as my incredibly able assistant director of the West Towns chorus. He was a marvelous arranger, a spiritual and loving person, a person who worked countless hours day after day for the b'shop harmony society. I'll never forget the many times I found Russ in the basement of Harmony Hall at 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning giving everything he could to our Society. He logged more hours of work than anyone should have ever done. People will never begin to know the commitment that he (and his dear, Nancy) gave to our B'shop Harmony Society. He also demonstrated a magnificent devotion to Harmony, Incorporated. Russ is a gem. He was entirely a giver and never asked for anything from anyone. He loved music, his b'shop society, his dear Nancy and his wonderful Joanna. I am entirely saddened that he is no longer with us. Russ was incredible in every way. We were always pals - always. My love, prayers are with Nancy and Joanna at this time. Thanks for the great times and memories, Russ! We will all miss you so much. – **Greg Lyne**, Accolade on Facebook

Russ Foris – In His Own Words I acted as the MVE's second Music Director, thus far the one with the longest tenure (from sometime in the early 90's – I don't remember exactly) to the summer of 2004 (which I do remember because we had lost our jobs and I knew we would have to leave Wisconsin by the end of 2004).

I presided over 2 Buckeye wins out of 3 appearances; 2 District Championships (the first ones for the MVE); and qualifying for a string of International Competition appearances starting in 1999. Subsequently, we never finished out of the Top Ten in six appearances, and earned two consecutive 5th Place Medals (again the first ones for the MVE).

I was privileged to assist in developing the chapter from a scant 20-some at the start to achieving "Century Club" status (over 100 members). I produced our first two CD's. I felt we fostered a "family friendly" environment at rehearsals, and nurtured several young men as singers and members. I adhered to the twin philosophies of "shared (team) leadership" and "chorus ownership of the music," setting a precedent of "directorless" performances on the International stage.

Having been around the barbershop world for more than 55 years, having been the Music Director of 5 choruses, having been a high school choral director and a host of other music leadership involvements - I still am of the opinion that each situation is unique and "one size does not fit all" with respect to developing a "sustainable" music ensemble. What works in one situation at one place and one time does not always apply in subsequent opportunities.

The unique, timely and effective BALANCE of music and administrative leadership - and the "team effort" of shared responsibilities and family involvement that came together at Greendale during my tenure - endure as its greatest assets, so that the MVE has continued to flourish. Enabling (allowing and encouraging) every man to become a better singer, ensemble member, and all-around person is key to the "specialness" of the MVE.

There are far too many memorable moments and events to even think of singling one out of the myriad. Because I am an educator and a minister of music at heart, I tend to consider the whole era I was privileged to serve as Music Director - and in that light, I think of the "sharing the wealth" or "passing the gift on" as more than sufficient satisfaction. -- **Russ Foris**

His Obituary: Russell Foris, 71 of Hot Springs Village passed away at home April 10, 2013. Born January 30, 1942 in Oak Park, Illinois, Russ was the only child of Alex C. and Helen (Imre) Foris. He was raised in Chicago and graduated Austin High School and Northern Illinois University, DeKalb with Bachelor's degrees in Music, Math and Philosophy. He also attended both Northeastern University and Chicago Theological Seminary for post-graduate work. Russ taught elementary school music in Dundee, Illinois and secondary music at Thornridge High School, Dalton, Illinois.



He married Nancy (Vollman) Foris in 1970 and she and daughter, JoAnna both of Hot Springs Village survive.

His gift of music will be greatly missed – his barbershop arrangements, his conducting skills with many male and female barbershop choruses, his coaching ability of both male and female barbershop choruses and quartets, his arrangements for Village Strings where he was also conductor and his ability to reach out and help someone improve. Russ worked for the Barbershop Harmony Society of Kenosha, Wisconsin for 15 years.

Though retired from teaching, tuning pianos, being a recording engineer and selling real estate, Russ worked in the Village as one of Woodlands Auditorium sound techs and at the sound board at Village Bible Church. He also advised sound techs at Christ Lutheran Church where he and his wife were members.

Armed Forces Medley & George Biltz Jr.

Singing the Armed Forces Medley has always been a challenge to me. Not the music, but the emotion when I put a “face” on the medley.

My Dad enlisted in the Army Air Corp as a junior at Mishawaka High School in Mishawaka, Indiana. (The High School’s nickname was *The Cavemen*, which is also the name of a barbershop chorus in Southern Kentucky).

Upon Graduation in 1944, the Army Air Corp had become the Air Force and he began his service to our country as a cryptographer in North Africa during WWII. After his discharge in 1946, he attended and graduated from Indiana University in 1950, at which time he was recalled to service during the Korean War until his final discharge in 1952.



George F. Biltz Jr. was born Feb 18, 1926 and died March 18, 2013. On behalf of my family, I’d like to thank you whether it was a thought or a prayer, a card, or a visit to pay your respects. Your brother in song, **John Biltz**

Editor’s Note: Perhaps we can honor John’s Dad, George Biltz Jr., in our hearts as we sing the Armed Forces Medley at our spring concert.

May 2013						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
April 28	April 29 MVE Practice	April 30 Sell tickets	1 Sell tickets	2 Sell tickets	3 LOL District Sp Convention Roseville, MN	4 LOL District Sp Convention Roseville, MN
5 Sell tickets	6 MVE Practice	7 Sell tickets	8 Sell tickets	9 Sell tickets Hydrate	10 Sell tickets Hydrate	11 MVE SPRING CONCERTS!
12	13 MVE Practice	14	15	16	17	18 Division One contest, Appleton, WI
19	20 MVE Practice	21	22	23	24	25
26	27 <u>Memorial Day</u> no practice	28 no practice	29	30	31	Hydrate Practice Use Mirrors