

Butch Berquist, Ed Phillips, Jim MacMillan and Scott Harwood Interview on the Tualatin Valley Harmony Masters and Forest Grove's barbershop history

Recorded July 21, 2025 at the Friends of Historic Forest Grove Old Train Station Museum
Interviewer: Elle Griego, History and French undergraduate student at Pacific University

Note on the text: This transcript was made through AI in 2025 with manual corrections. We recommend checking this text against the audio recording before quoting the speakers, as it may contain errors.

Elle Griego 0:00

Greetings, I'm Elle Griego behind the camera, and I am here with four members of the Tualatin Valley Harmony Masters. We have Butch Berquist, Ed Phillips, Jim MacMillan and Scott Harwood. We are at the Friends of Historic Forest Grove Old Train Station Museum in Forest Grove, Oregon, on July 21, 2025. I will be asking these gentlemen about the history and their memories of the Tualatin Valley Harmony Masters organization, the Gay Nineties -- just a little bit -- and the Original All-Northwest Barbershop Contest, and what it has evolved into today. Thank you so much for being here with me today.

Scott Harwood 0:42

Would you like the clap?

Elle Griego 0:46

Oh, I forgot! No worries. Yeah.

Scott Harwood 0:46

It's not at the beginning.

Elle Griego 0:49

Yeah, thank you. I would first like to start by learning about each of you individually, outside of the context of barbershop. Where and when were you each born? We could start here and around where and were you born? Were you born here in the area?

Butch Berquist 1:10

I was born in Pennsylvania. Grew up in Ohio, moved here after eight years in the Air Force and two years working for Tektronix in Detroit, Michigan, and transferred here.

Elle Griego 1:22

I see. Oh, wow, so you came with Tektronix. What year was that that you came over here? [Berquist: '73.] All right, and you?

Ed Phillips 1:32

And I grew up in California, moved up here, started a family in '92.

Elle Griego 1:39

Yeah. And what year were you born? [Phillips: 1959.] 1959, all right. And then did you say what year you were born? [Berquist: '45.] 45, all right. And then you?

Jim MacMillan 1:50

Yeah, I was born in 1955 in Glendale, California, and when I was about a year and a half old, we moved down to Balboa Island, Newport Beach, where I grew up, met my wife, worked in Disneyland, moved up here in 1993.

Scott Harwood 2:09

I was born in 1967 in Michigan. Lived there for two weeks, and we left. [Harwood laughs.] Moved here in... '96, I think it was, got married and settled down in the Hillsboro area.

Elle Griego 2:26

Yeah, all right. And then, how did all of you get involved in Tualatin Valley Harmony Masters? It's interesting, because none of you are from Forest Grove, but you all have gone into this organization, that kind of that comes from before all of your times with the barbershop ballad contest here in '46... It was, it seems like it was the Gleemen first. Is that right, Butch? [Berquist: I'm sorry?] Was it the Forest Grove Gleemen first?

Butch Berquist 3:02

I sang with them first. And then I was in between singing groups, and actually saw an ad in the Hillsboro Argus from the Tualatin Valley Harmony Masters for having a guest night. That was 29 years ago. And I came and visited, and stayed. Still there.

Elle Griego 3:23

Yeah. What was appealing to you about the group, the Gleemen?

Butch Berquist 3:27

Well, again, the Gleemen. I really enjoyed singing with them. We did everything. We went to Expo 86 and sang up there, did a lot. And they sing, basically jazz and Broadway. But they also -- jumping ahead -- were the ones that put on the ballad contest. And of course, when I started singing with them in '83, I immediately got involved in helping with the contest, because that's what they ran. [Griego: That makes sense.] And so I got to know all the barbershoppers. And then when it came time to find something new to sing with, and I saw the ad in the paper, I joined TVHM.

Elle Griego 4:07

Yeah, wonderful. And then, how did you three end up joining? Did you... I'm assuming you all joined when it was Tualatin Valley Harmony Masters and not the Gleemen.

Butch Berquist 4:18

In fact, there's never been a connection between them, they are two separate organizations.

Elle Griego 4:19

That's what I thought. Yeah, it seems like it's branched off, like people who were in the Gleemen kind of switched up. [Berquist: Just because.] Yeah, that's good to know. That's wonderful to know.

Jim MacMillan 4:33

Well, I was singing in Southern California for about a year and a half, barbershop, and when we moved to Oregon, and that was in '93, and then I just didn't sing anything for a while. But we, again, we probably saw the same ad he did, and we went to a show at the old Hillsboro High School, and this crazy group called the Aliens, with Chuck Olson, it was amazing. The chorus I sang with back there was kind of stick in the mud, kind of tuxedo looking. Came up here, and the costumes were outrageously funny, and most of their songs were parodies, just tons of comedy. And I thought, "I could do that." My father-in-law had just moved up here as well, and my mother-in-law, and he said, "Hey, let's check out a rehearsal." And I'm like, "Okay, I guess so." And we did, and it's probably about a year after you... [Berquist: Yeah.] and because, well, yeah, you were the president of the group at the time. So it reeled me in. And so somewhere around 1999 I think I became a member. May have been earlier than that?

Elle Griego 5:53

Yeah. So it's interesting, it seems like the comedy aspect drew you in. [MacMillan: Oh, yeah.] Would you say that was the biggest appeal to you?

Jim MacMillan 6:03

Absolutely, yes,

Elle Griego 6:04

That's interesting. It's good to know. And then, what about you, Ed?

Ed Phillips 6:12

Well, I started in 2010 and I just randomly went online and found a barbershop chorus and just decided to show up one week. But I put it off for quite a while. Somehow it was connected with him. I service printers and copiers, and they'd been telling me to go for months and months. "Well, I saw them online. I'll go eventually." And eventually I did show up, and I just stuck with it. And you know, really the comedy thing, the looseness of it appealed to me as well. My first competition, I was a cow. [Harwood laughs.] Everybody else was... [MacMillan: We were sheep.] sheep, and I got to yell "Moo!" in the middle of the song. Who wouldn't stick around?

Elle Griego 7:02

Wow. How funny. And then what about you, Scott?

Scott Harwood 7:09

I just wandered in off the street one day [Harwood laughs] [Phillips: Pretty much.] Heard about the mooing and the baaing. No I -- actually, right after my son was born, I went to a barbershop group in Portland, which I think is defunct now, and I rehearsed with them just two nights, and realized this is going to take a lot more energy than I have. I need to spend my time with my young family, so I didn't sing barbershop. And then once my kids were away at school and on their own much more, I just... I had been to a few concerts, a couple of the quartet shows and one of the international shows in Portland, and decided, "Hey, I love singing. I love tight harmonies. Let's try this barbershop stuff out." So I looked it up, and TVHM was closest around. Came and started singing with them. And they sat me next to this guy and said, "Hey, let him show you the ropes," and within about eight months, I started singing tenor, because your tenor was going to be gone for the next show. [Phillips: That was just me.] So you had me singing tenor with you, and then a few months later, you threw me onto baritone. After the head show, but baritone ever since.

Elle Griego 8:45

And around what year did you join?

Scott Harwood 8:49
2019, right before COVID hit.

Elle Griego 8:51
Really? Oh, wow, that is so recent.

Scott Harwood 8:54
Yeah, I sang in the Christmas show right before COVID hit. And that was fun.

Elle Griego 9:02
Yeah, and you mentioned the international kind of contest in Portland. Yeah, I've heard about that just really briefly before. Is that an annual thing?

Butch Berquist 9:17
We had two internationals in Portland, one in 2002 and the other one in 2012. [Griego: I see.] The international this year was in Denver. I think next year is San Francisco. It goes all over the place, but it is literally international. There's quartets from the United States, Canada, Europe, Africa, Asia, Australia, New Zealand.

Elle Griego 9:42
Yeah, that's amazing. You said there was two of them. I think I recall where I heard about the international contest... I think it was with the barbershop pole I heard, or I read that it was built after Chuck Olson had gone to a different contest, I think, in Texas, and saw a bigger pole, the then world's tallest pole, and he wanted to do something for the international contest in Portland, but I don't know, because I think the barbershop pole. I assumed it was like 50 years old, so I wonder...

Butch Berquist 10:23
That was the 2002 one.

Elle Griego 10:24
Oh, that was the 2002 one. Okay, that's good to know.

Ed Phillips 10:26
And then he brought it out here! Trying to think of who was the head of the one in 2012, and his name doesn't come up in my head...

Elle Griego 10:39
Yeah. Was there... do you remember, was there a sort of ceremony for the barbershop pole when it was brought over here? When the barbershop pole, when that was done being used for the 2002

Butch Berquist 10:52
Oh, the barber pole? [Griego: Yeah.] Originally it was done for 2002. For 2012, what we did was we had folks come and repaint it, and stand it up, put the plaque on it.

Scott Harwood 11:04
So was there any kind of a ceremony for planting it out here?

Butch Berquist 11:09

There was, you know, the MC did his thing about it, but they didn't bring people out. We did. I mean, the chorus was...

Elle Griego 11:20

All right. And could you all tell me a bit about Tualatin Valley Harmony's history, just generally? It seems, if I understand correctly it was Chuck Olson, who founded it? [MacMillan: In 1974.] Unfortunately, I never got the chance to meet him before he passed away. Could you all tell me a bit about him and what he's done for this organization?

Jim MacMillan 11:49

Everything. [Phillips: Yeah.] He lived and breathed old school barbershop, and I think that's what we would like too. He was funny, he was a good singer. He was an incredible entertainer. So in the chorus, he was our director for a while -- we've had numerous directors. Butch was a director, Scott's our director now. But not just the chorus, but he was in a quartet, the Aliens, and they were together singing... [Berquist: 30 years.] 30, 35, I think it was. They sang in Vietnam USO tours, all over the place. But he was an amazing man. Actually, he was married forever, until the day he died, Bev his wife was a great supporter.

Butch Berquist 12:41

Yeah. Chuck sang with, I think it was the Mount Hood Timberliners before, and then started the chorus out here, because it was near home. [Phillips: That was way out there.] Yeah, Timberline is way on the other side. Yeah, I can remember when the first time he told me that he wanted to step away from being the front line director. And I went on the society's website, and I put out a director search information. And I had a number of people who were international champion quartet members and directors who would send me notes and say, "I don't want the job, but I can't imagine anybody that can replace Chuck Olson," because he was that well renowned throughout the entire society. Crazy Guy. Loved him. [Griego: Yeah.]

Jim MacMillan 13:34

This picture gives you an example of what Chuck was.

Elle Griego 13:39

Oh, yeah. Oh, lovely -- and I can see it from here, and you'll have to here, and you'll have to send me that afterwards.

Jim MacMillan 13:45

Yeah, I'll send you -- I just posted this on our Facebook page, along with a bunch of others.

Elle Griego 13:51

I can find that.

Jim MacMillan 13:53

Yeah, you got our...

Scott Harwood 13:54

My second year singing, they sat me next to Chuck, because I was learning baritone, and so they sent me next to him. Aïe aïe aïe. He taught me a lot.

Ed Phillips 14:04

He always had a story. We would go out singing Valentine's, Butch was out. Couldn't make it. He would come and be our baritone. Oh, my goodness -- I drove a lot of the time. I don't know how I could keep it. Oh, he was amazing. I couldn't stop laughing. He was quite the entertainer when he wanted to be and when he didn't want to be.

Scott Harwood 14:29

Very kind. Oh, generous out the wazoo. [Phillips: Yeah.]

Elle Griego 14:35

Yeah. I know... it's interesting, Chuck Olson... I've noticed just with the photos that we do have of the Gay Nineties festival, for example, the early years that he's there. So he's really been here since the beginning of this history. What do you think motivated him to organize the group? Was it just, as you said, to have barbershop closer?

Butch Berquist 15:01

He loved barbershop, and this was near home. And I have no idea how he got the first guys here, but, you know, by the time I came along, it was a big group. We were rehearsing in Hillsboro, and probably 25 guys in the group. I know I started out because I sang tenor in church choir. I said, "Oh, I'll be a tenor." It lasted two weeks. I can't sing that high. So, I sang lead, which is the melody typical, for like, 15 years. And then one year, during Valentine's, there was an empty spot in a quartet. They needed somebody to sing baritone. I said, "Well, I can sing those two songs," and I did. And when I came back to the next rehearsal after Valentine's, Chuck said, "Why don't you stay on baritone?" 15 years now.

Jim MacMillan 15:52

I have a copy of our original charter from 1974 and there were over, I think I counted 35 names.

Butch Berquist 16:02

Yeah, it was a big chorus at the time.

Jim MacMillan 16:09

That's crazy.

Elle Griego 16:09

Yeah, it's interesting to me because it was organized at the height of, you know, the barbershop contest that was here in Forest Grove, the Original All-Northwest Barbershop Ballad Contest, which is, I don't know the history. I'm trying to find out is... it almost seems like you guys are the legacy of that original contest that started in the '40s. I know that West Side Singers is another group that's kind of branched off. I would say that I know the Gay Nineties festival as it was ended in the 1990s, and then the contest... what I don't know is how it went from this contest that was on national television and radio to now, it seems that the only barbershop contest we have is the one that you guys host.

Butch Berquist 16:48

I don't think there was a there was... there was never a direct connection between Forest Grove Gleemen and Girls of Lehman and Tualatin Valley, but pretty much every year there was a quartet from Tualatin Valley in the contest. [Griego: I see.] Never won. I don't think we ever got any money. [Griego: Yeah.] In fact, we sang one year in the contest, [Phillips: We did.] with Bob Dodge. [Phillips: Yeah.] And we didn't

come in last. [Berquist laughs.]

Scott Harwood 17:18
So the Gleemen used to run it...

Butch Berquist 17:20
Oh that... the Gleemen started it, they were the Forest Grove Gleemen, in 1946. Just because they'd heard of -- I wrote a history of it someplace you might have it already. They heard about this barbershop stuff back east, some contest. They decided to do one here in Forest Grove, you know. So they started it in '46. And we have the pictures. You should have access to the pictures if you go on Facebook and look for all the pictures from the very first winter to the last one that we did.

Scott Harwood 17:49
So, when did TVHM take over?

Butch Berquist 17:52
Huh... was it... '12, '13, something like that? [MacMillan: Yeah.]

Scott Harwood 17:52
So the Gleemen decided we're kind of done with this.

Butch Berquist 17:52
Yeah. In fact, what happened was they pretty much decided they were done with it, because they'd gone in a different direction. They're down about their fourth director now, and there were a number of us in the chapter who said, you know, this is so important to Forest Grove, we got to keep it going. So the very first year that Tualatin Valley ran the contest, the Gleemen were right beside us, helping us out, get us started. And then they walked away, okay? And we ran it, and we brought some super quartets in. And, in fact, the reason that it ceased to exist is because we failed to have paying customers in the seats, enough to cover the expenses. And it was a very expensive -- about \$20,000 a year to run the contest. And it was spectacular. I mean, we had quartets from all over the Northwest coming, and that was when Tualatin Valley was running it. We made a couple mistakes to the audience. We brought in Miss America one year. Headliner, she's going to be our big deal. She went out there and sang opera.

Jim MacMillan 19:10
It wasn't barbershop.

Elle Griego 19:11
Nooo!

Butch Berquist 19:11
Yeah. Another year, we brought in a group, because the old contest had so much variety in them, we brought in a group that was basically a rock and roll band. A few more people left the audience. So, yeah.

Jim MacMillan 19:28
Well, and it's also... you think about when it started, in what, 1946. Think about the times then, and what was available for entertainment. [Berquist: No TVs.] Not nearly... now, there's something on every corner of every street in the country. There's bars, there's restaurants, there's movie theaters, there's Netflix, there's

everything. So, yeah, you can get your phones to, you know? So it's much harder to get an audience to show... I mean, I suppose if Paul McCartney came to Forest Grove, it would sell out, but barbershop is kind of fizzling away a little bit. [Griego: Yeah.]

Butch Berquist 20:08

When the city changed the entry thing from "Ballad Town, U.S.A." to "The Home of Pacific University," it was a clue. [MacMillan: Yeah.]

Elle Griego 20:16

Oh, I didn't know that.

Jim MacMillan 20:17

When you would drive in, it would say, "Home of Ballad Town, U.S.A."

Elle Griego 20:21

Oh, I had no idea.

Jim MacMillan 20:22

So the city just also kind of failed us.

Scott Harwood 20:26

That was very recent, though, right?

Butch Berquist 20:28

Yeah, there's Ballad Town now, where the Safeway is, that's Ballad Town Square.

Jim MacMillan 20:32

Yeah, well so we're trying to keep ballot town alive.

Elle Griego 20:36

Yeah, no, that's interesting. I'm assuming that you, Butch, went to the contest back in the day, when it was hosted by the Gleemen. I guess I'm curious, what has changed demographics wise, in terms of, well, how many people are going how? How has that changed?

Butch Berquist 21:01

So when I first joined the Gleemen, '82, '83, that first contest, we were in the Pacific University field house, and we set up 1000 chairs on the floor. And we ran three shows, and they were pretty much full. After setting up the chairs, I would and one of the ladies were in charge at the box office. That's kind of what I did for the while that I was with the Gleemen. One of our good friends in baritone, always worked -- Tualatin Valley -- I always worked with that show. He was always dealing with the parking lot, getting people out there. So when I joined TVHM he, of course, got me with my arm behind my back, and I helped him with parking for the time until the Gleemen quit, and then -- Westside Singers, whatever they call themselves. And then I quickly moved into a leadership role of the contest, because I had the most history. We had one other guy try it one year, and then I helped another guy, and then he went in to become my finance guy while I was the engineering manager for 20 years. So they put me in charge of things and we ran a contest. We had a great contest. We had a super contest. Wow, just the singing... whatever. Of course, we had the girls one year, we had girl quartets come. In fact, we had a female headliner one year. They were an

international champion female quartet from Sweden. It was a lot of fun.

Jim MacMillan 22:50

When we came up here, we heard about the Ballad Town contest in the big field house, not at the high school. And we went and attended, and it was a humongous, like, he's saying, 1000 chairs. So the whole -- they had a stage set up, they had all the seats on the floor, and then bleachers. I mean, we had to sit up in the bleachers. It was that full, but you get there an hour before, and they had a Dixieland jazz band playing the whole time, and then they had the can-can girls dancing. It was just, it was an incredible... it was a show before the show.

Butch Berquist 23:31

So the smaller club from PU used to set up the stage for us, and then we had these very large pieces of, I don't know... basically there are pieces of not quite plywood, almost the size of this table. And we would set them up on the stage, paint them all white, with two by twos around it to hold them in place. And then one of the artists in town came and painted a scene, a Gay Nineties scene on that. And then it was ready for the show. And there was so much that went into it.

Jim MacMillan 24:09

It was so good.

Scott Harwood 24:11

I recall that these, this was like a week or two long event, right?

Butch Berquist 24:16

The whole Gay Nineties thing was a week long. The show was, it was a Friday, Saturday.

Jim MacMillan 24:20

That was the end of the week. That was a kind of a celebration.

Butch Berquist 24:23

And they were all dressed up in their Gay Nineties outfits in a parade, and...

Jim MacMillan 24:27

All the shop owners would dress up. They had children's coloring contests in the schools. In fact, when we took it over, Chuck put together a little coloring book that he put out in all of the local elementary schools trying to rekindle that and get it going again. I don't remember how that went, but...

Ed Phillips 24:49

The time of the year when they would have the parade, there'd be snow on the ground still. That was kind of the appeal of how that slowly went downhill, and the parade wasn't as much fun in that type of weather. I think that's what Chuck was telling me, that they started not doing that so much.

Butch Berquist 25:09

When I was with the Gleemen, we moved the contest to May one year. The unfortunate part of that was... quartets coming to the contest could be on stage and have an audience and everything, and then a month later, they would go to their competition. By moving the show to May all the competitions were over. Wasn't a prep anymore for the quartets. So, yeah.

Ed Phillips 25:32
One more stepping stone.

Butch Berquist 25:34
We did that only one year. Only one year. Learned our lesson.

Elle Griego 25:39
Yeah, that makes so much sense.

Butch Berquist 25:42
I say we, I didn't run it. George Horner ran it.

Elle Griego 25:45
That's a name I know.

Ed Phillips 25:46
Yeah, I do too.

Jim MacMillan 25:47
He was an old dude. He was always old. I think he was always 90 plus.

Elle Griego 25:56
And with Tualatin Valley Harmony Masters, I'm curious how its members have changed over the years. Has there always been -- it sounds like there's always been multiple quartets under the organization. Has there been less and less quartets over the years, or?

Jim MacMillan 26:18
Less and less everything really. [Griego: I see]. In fact, maybe this time last year we would... well, when I joined, there were about 45 guys on stage, and that was during our gangster set. That was fun. And then little by little, it just slows down. And not just us, but barbershop in general. But for us, about a year or so ago, we were having... we might get 15 people to show up for rehearsals, and trying to keep it alive. And then at one point, it was like we were averaging maybe eight to 10, and at that point we thought...

Scott Harwood 26:59
We had two weeks in a row, I remember that we didn't have enough guys for all four parts we had. We had six bases and two baritones. [Harwood laughs.]

Jim MacMillan 27:07
So we were approaching our Christmas season last year, and we thought... "Wonder if we should open it up to the community?" Then Ed says, "Yeah, and let's open it up to ladies. Let's open up to everybody." And we did. And right now our...

Scott Harwood 27:27
We had like 35, 40 people.

Jim MacMillan 27:29

We had a ton of people. So all of the sudden, barbershop is alive and well again in Forest Grove, but it's not men only. [Griego: Yeah.] We're a mixed chorus now, and I think I counted 31 at rehearsal two nights ago. And that's kind of our average, 25 to 30 right now.

Elle Griego 27:51

Oh, that's wonderful.

Butch Berquist 27:52

So from 1937 until 2017, the Barbershop Harmony Society, whatever they called themselves, was a men only group. In 2017, the CEO of BHS said, "Let's make this everyone in harmony." And so that was the beginning of the mixed quartets, the mixed choruses, the women's only choruses, the men's only choruses. And so it took Tualatin Valley how many years from 2017?

Jim MacMillan 28:22

It took a while. We purposely remained a men's chorus. Chuck Olson was adamant, "Barbershop is for guys." I mean, we all respected that, and that's okay. It was. Until now. And, I mean, we just had this international contest in Denver, the top five quartets. Fifth place was an all ladies quartet. Times have changed, you know.

Ed Phillips 28:50

And we changed our name, too. We went from Tualatin Valley Harmony Masters to the Ballad Town Harmony, on that sticker.

Elle Griego 28:56

Oh, how recent was that change? I didn't know that.

Jim MacMillan 28:58

This year.

Elle Griego 28:59

Okay, so that is recent.

Jim MacMillan 29:00

January, February. So we are Tualatin Valley Harmony masters. That's our legal chapter name, but our chorus is now Ballad Town Harmony.

Elle Griego 29:10

Oh, I like that. That's good to know.

Ed Phillips 29:12

Getting that Ballad Town back into it.

Elle Griego 29:16

Yeah. What do you all hope for the future of the organization?

Jim MacMillan 29:19

I hope that the city of Forest Grove and people like yourself would want it again to the point of a parade and make it a week long event, and then the contest at the end. I could support that. It's hard to support just having a Ballard Town contest, because it didn't work in recent years. But if we had support from the chamber of commerce and the city people and Pacific University and citizens. You know, on Facebook, I see people loving how the parades used to be and all this and that. Well, but nobody's doing anything about it. If somebody were to do something about it, I would, I can't speak for our whole chorus, I would jump into that today.

Ed Phillips 30:07

And we could get quartets to come and compete. That's not the problem. The problem was getting involvement and money.

Jim MacMillan 30:14

But if we had the community behind it, people would show up, because people are the community.

Elle Griego 30:21

Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. In terms of the decline of the contest and the festival, it seems like a lot of it had to do with what we've already talked about, changing technology, where people, if they want entertainment, can go on TV or also in other interviews, I've talked about, if I've talked with people about, you know, the way that Forest Grove's become more of a bedroom community and not one that's more self contained. So people don't always work in Forest Grove anymore. They work elsewhere, so they're not in the community as much. Well, first, I'm curious, would you say that most people who are in Ballard Town Harmony are from Forest Grove, or are they coming from the suburbs of Portland, all over?

Jim MacMillan 31:12

There's a good handful from Forest Grove and Cornelius. [Griego: I see.] Gaston.

Scott Harwood 31:19

Hillsboro. [MacMillan: Hillsboro.]

Butch Berquist 31:21

Aloha, [MacMillan Aloha.] Dayton.

Jim MacMillan 31:25

Where did Gerry live? Banks? Yeah, so...

Butch Berquist 31:29

Gales Creek.

Jim MacMillan 31:30

Yeah, not a lot of people coming from Gresham to here.

Butch Berquist 31:34

Again, there are four barbershop choruses in Portland. They would have to have some real big draw to come here, rather than go to one local if they want to sing. That's the other thing, getting people to sing. You could sing. Most people say, "I don't sing." I mean, I always said, "Not yet." We'll teach you! Come on Tuesday night.

Jim MacMillan 32:00
Everybody sings in their car.

Ed Phillips 32:02
I think you just got an invitation. [Everyone laughs.]

Butch Berquist 32:04
As a matter of fact, she did.

Ed Phillips 32:07
I kind of got that.

Jim MacMillan 32:08
Way to go, Butch.

Scott Harwood 32:10
I find it, yeah, philosophically interesting, because our society, well, part of the problem that Forest Grove is facing related to civic engagement and community is that if you're a small town, then everybody kind of getting to know each other and getting behind something is a little bit easier to do. The bigger you get, the harder it is to get everybody, the whole community, wrapped around some idea. And so the growth is a real impediment to that.

Elle Griego 32:45
Yeah, that makes sense.

Scott Harwood 32:45
In addition to the technology changes and societal changes, people just want to hide out in their rooms because people are ugly out there. They're not! Come sing with us. We have a lot of fun. [Harwood laughs.]

Elle Griego 32:46
Yeah, no, that makes a lot of sense. I'm curious. Have you guys, I'm assuming, been to like the Concours d'Elegance car show, or like the farmer's market? It seems like those are kind of the ways that Forest Grove gets together now.

Butch Berquist 33:17
When I was singing with the Gleemen, we used to always sing about noontime for the car show. [Griego: Really?] Yeah. The Concours d'Elegance.

Ed Phillips 33:28
We'll sing at the corn roast this year again, we always do the national anthem. They'll give us a little time on stage, do a couple more songs.

Jim MacMillan 33:37

We're involved with the Wednesday market a few times this year.

Elle Griego 33:40

That's good. [MacMillan: Yeah.]

Scott Harwood 33:41

And last year...

Jim MacMillan 33:43

Yeah. In fact, just in a week or two, we'll be singing there.

Butch Berquist 33:46

We sang at the university a couple times, a quartet did, I can't remember, Forest Grove Stars, or something like that.

Ed Phillips 33:53

Oh yeah, the talent show.

Jim MacMillan 33:55

We also made a good connection with the American Legion. We sang the National Anthem and a few other songs on Memorial Day at the cemetery right down the street, and potentially we're gonna sing for something they're doing on Veterans Day. We'll see.

Elle Griego 34:14

Yeah, it's interesting with Pacific University, do you have any students who are going and participating in the group?

Jim MacMillan 34:23

We don't, and we've always wanted that, but we don't have that connection.

Ed Phillips 34:27

We've had a few connections, but they just didn't last. [Griego: Yeah.] We met that one gal, we reached out a couple times.

Jim MacMillan 34:37

Yeah, we bumped into the lady that apparently is the director of the music program. [Harwood: Coral.] Coral, which is what we would want. [Phillips: Absolutely.] And so we, bunch of us, tried to contact her with no results, no response. And okay, what are you gonna do?

Elle Griego 34:57

Yeah, we'll talk after the interview. Because I have a few ideas of how you guys could get connected to the university.

Ed Phillips 35:03
Oh, good.

Scott Harwood 35:03
Yeah, we sang at the Hops games, baseball. We haven't done hockey in a long time, but a lot of different things.

Jim MacMillan 35:17
And our Ballad Town in the Grove picnic coming up in August, that's a big deal. This is our eighth annual right here in Rogers Park, just a few blocks that way.

Elle Griego 35:27
And how is that different from the contest?

Jim MacMillan 35:32
Well, it's not a contest. [Griego: Yeah.] Kind of is, but it's...

Butch Berquist 35:35
What did we say that one year? It was no trophy, no money, [MacMillan: Nothing.] Go explore.

Jim MacMillan 35:41
It's really, it's a barbershop themed picnic. We will provide free hot dogs. We cook up hot dogs, anyone that comes off the street, anybody. And we've invited other quartets. I've got a few quartets that are coming, then our own quartets and our chorus will sing. And then, so, the contest. We do have a contest. So here's how that works. It's a random draw quartet contest. So he sings baritone, I sing bass, he sings tenor, and he sings lead. You put your name in those buckets, and might have 20 people. You pull it out, and that's who you get to sing with. So you go off to the corner and you figure out what song you want. You come back and sing, "Let Me Call You Sweetheart," or whatever it is, and you're judged by usually, who do you like? Number one, number two. And my wife and I put together some goofy gifts, not like Ballad Town, where the winner went home with \$1,000. [Berquist: At least.] At least, yeah. No, this is, you go home with candy or something, so.

Scott Harwood 36:51
It's a real blast.

Jim MacMillan 36:53
It's a blast. And it's very informal, Old Town, Forest Grove, small town, yeah, it's good. We had a few barbershoppers this year contact me, because I usually run the thing. And we considered, and we're not going to, but to making it a contest contest with actual prizes and so on. We're not going to do that. We all discussed it. We would rather keep it what it is now. It's a simple, just for fun thing. It's a picnic. And I honestly think, because we changed back to our way, some people won't come. Some of the quartets that I invited are all of a sudden busy, you know?

Ed Phillips 37:44
Yeah, they want this competition, but they weren't the ones backing us up with support.

Jim MacMillan 37:50

Yeah, So, and that's okay too, because we're gonna have a great time. And it's neat because people just show up off the street. They hear about it, and Melody [i.e. Melody Haveluck] came a couple years ago and took one of the pictures that we use all the time.

Ed Phillips 38:04

Yeah, she's always coming to the stuff that we do now.

Elle Griego 38:08

Yeah. So why do you all think you've stuck with barbershop all these years? You know, we've talked about how times have changed. Some people like rock and roll music better. Why have you stuck to barbershop? I guess, what would you say to people who are curious about joining your group and might be wondering, "Okay, why should I spend my time doing barbershop music? Why should I join the Ballad Town Harmony?"

Butch Berquist 38:34

Ringin a chord is a spiritual experience. [Harwood laughs.] It literally is. When you know everybody is singing exactly the way they're supposed to to make that chord work, and you get overtones that sound like angels [unintelligible] out there or something. Yeah, it's for your soul.

Jim MacMillan 38:54

And it's us. It's just God given vocals. Last Thursday, we went to a concert at Shute Park in Hillsboro. Was the Eagles. Not the Eagles, but it was a tribute band that were almost as good as the Eagles, right? They were amazing. Their very last song was acapella, and that was my favorite one. "Seven Bridges."

Butch Berquist 38:54

They did "Seven Bridges?"

Jim MacMillan 39:17

I mean, it started acapella, then it went into guitar, but it was so... I mean, I got chills thinking about it.

Butch Berquist 39:26

It's our quartet songs.

Scott Harwood 39:27

And besides the music...

Butch Berquist 39:31

The camaraderie and all...

Scott Harwood 39:33

People come for the music, but they stay for the friends, is the thing I used to hear. [Phillips: Yeah.] And it's so true that, from the top down, from the president of -- or whatever he calls himself, the leader of the International Organization of Barbershoppers, they teach a way of dealing with people. And leadership. It makes such a difference. If you go to a chorus and the director says, "Hey, Paul, you sung that note flat three times in a row. Let's get it right." Well, nobody wants to be Paul. Nobody wants to be sitting next to Paul. Nobody wants to be in that chorus. That's no fun. If instead, the director says, "There seems to be some disagreement with the paces on what that note is. Here's what it should sound like." Model it. "Okay.

Now you try it. Okay. That was closer. Listen to me again." Model it again. "All right. You give it another shot. Oh, that was really close. One more time. All right, you got it. Okay. Now let's everybody together. Oh yeah, nailed it! Fantastic job!" You just turned something that is "You're screwing up, into "Wow! Look at the success we just had." That is so much fun, and that's so much a part of barbershop and who barbershoppers are. I've been in churches my entire life, with so many weekend events where we spend the whole weekend together, camping or church camp outs and stuff. Camping meetings, I have never experienced anything as positively uplifting as a weekend training course up in Tacoma for barbershoppers, everybody was so intent on lifting up the people around them, and in working hard and having joy and interpersonal relationships, that's just phenomenal. I don't know any other organization that is as good at that kind of leadership as barbershop.

Jim MacMillan 41:52

And now Scott's going, he just talked about a weekend in Tacoma. He's going for a week in Denver for training.

Scott Harwood 41:59

Yeah. So exciting.

Butch Berquist 42:01

One of the things that the Barbershop Harmony Society did a long, long time ago was they put together 12 songs. Called them Polecats. And they said, "Everybody learn these songs." Everybody in the whole society. So when you go someplace, convention or whatever, and you have your name taken on, it says, "I sing lead," "I sing bass," "I sing tenor," ... "Hey, let's sing a song. How about 'Wild Irish Rose?'" They all know it. Yeah. So four random people can put together and start ringing chords.

Jim MacMillan 42:34

Barbershop to me, is a way of life. You know, when I worked at Disneyland, we had a saying, the cast members. "You can take the person out of Disneyland, but you can't take Disneyland out of the person." It's the same. Our rehearsal is barbershop. You can take the person out of barbershop, but you're not taking barbershop out of the person. I can't tell you how many times I don't sleep at night because I'm trying to fall asleep singing my songs. [Harwood laughs.] Especially the new ones, "Frogs Kissin'." Come on, I need to go to bed. I look at the clocks like, stop it.

Ed Phillips 43:09

Non-stop.

Jim MacMillan 43:12

It's a way of living.

Ed Phillips 43:13

Wake up with the same darn song stuck in your head.

Butch Berquist 43:15

Of course, the other thing we do is we do music tracks that you can either do there or do on your computer so you can listen to your part. Okay, so with my fancy, expensive hearing aids, I can put this on here and have it directly in my ear. She doesn't like it, however, when I sing just a baritone solo. [Harwood laughs.] He knows! In barbershop, the lead tells a story. The bass sings a melody. The tenor puts in some ruffles and flourishes, and the baritone gets all the extra notes to fill in the chord.

Jim MacMillan 43:52
That nobody wants.

Butch Berquist 43:53
So it's all over the place.

Jim MacMillan 43:56
My wife's singing with us, baritone. She's loving it. So she's singing the chorus and in a quartet with me and Ed and my daughter. So wow, all of a sudden, after so many years, she's singing now. And Emily.

Ed Phillips 44:13
So now you're coming to the picnic at least, right?

Elle Griego 44:15
Oh, yeah, I try to go. I think I've gone to one or two times.

Ed Phillips 44:18
I think you have, yeah.

Elle Griego 44:19
Yeah, no, that's great. And something I think, with barbershop music, are you all singing older songs? I know there's, like the classical songs, and I'm curious, is there any newer songs? Or how do you choose the music?

Jim MacMillan 44:34
So a lot of us like the older songs, [Griego: Yeah.] but we would like younger people to join, and they're the ones that are wanting the newer, more current songs.

Butch Berquist 44:46
But you have to understand that for us, the old songs were from the 1950s and '60s. Now, if you go back to the 1920s, I think it is now, those songs back there, there's no more copyright. You. Copyright runs out on those so you can sing them. You don't have to pay any fees or whatever you sing in the contest. So when barbershop started, the old songs were those previous songs, and of course, they were still copyrighted. Time goes by. Her father was singing Barbershop back in 1945, before I was born. Anyway, so as time goes by, we sing some really old songs like those. [Griego: Yeah.] But we're also singing...

Ed Phillips 45:30
"The Lion Sleeps Tonight."

Scott Harwood 45:33
And '50s and '60s.

Jim MacMillan 45:35
For the longest time.

Scott Harwood 45:39

But there are choruses and quartets that do much more recent stuff. Like, I think it was two, three years ago, the international champions, one chorus won singing the musical, "The Greatest Showman," which isn't brand new, but I've also heard quartets doing stuff from Lady Gaga. So there's a lot of new barbershop arrangements of even new songs. One of the cool things about barbershop is that while it is its own genre, it's different in that we sing stuff from all the other genres, whether it's old or new. Do a little tweaking, and you can turn a lot of different songs into barbershop, and they sound really cool.

Elle Griego 46:37

Yeah, some of the...

Butch Berquist 46:39

You gotta keep the melody, or else nobody will recognize it.

Scott Harwood 46:41

Yeah, right. [Harwood laughss.] The melody and the basic chord structure, yeah.

Butch Berquist 46:46

We were singing "Hallelujah" one Christmas.

Scott Harwood 46:48

Oh, the new one.

Butch Berquist 46:51

Yeah, yeah, with... oh, what's their name... Pentatonix.

Elle Griego 47:00

Yeah, some of the classical songs, I think are interesting. I'm trying to think the fact that barbershop, even today, is still kind of, people have an image in their min of these classical songs, kind of represent an older America, or America of the past. You know, it's interesting how the barbershop contest originally brought up, like the contest started, and then the Gay Nineties started in connection with that, because people thought, "Oh, barbershop, that's simpler times like the Gay Ninetes." And do you think... do you associate barbershop... of course, at least there's easy ways to bring newer songs to barbershop, but I guess, do these classical songs represent something? What do they represent, more generally?

Ed Phillips 47:59

Tradition. I think, more than anything else, when we sing an old barbershop song, some of us that have been singing for a while, it does. It makes us reflect, get that feel of old town, like you would get in "The Sound of Music." No, not "The Sound of Music." What is the one... "The Music Man." "Lida Rose," ice cream, those kind of things. Least, that's what I... image.

Butch Berquist 48:30

One group I sang with, we sang "Phantom of the Opera" songs. [Griego: Oh, really?] That was a Central Oregon group.

Jim MacMillan 48:40

So our chorus right now, we range from 15 years old to mid-70s.

Butch Berquist 48:47
Keep going up.

Jim MacMillan 48:48
Yeah, he's...

Butch Berquist 48:52
Late '70s. I turn 80 this year.

Jim MacMillan 48:53
No, really?

Butch Berquist 48:54
Yes.

Jim MacMillan 48:55
Hallelujah. That's awesome.

Scott Harwood 48:57
Chuck was... just died last year...

Butch Berquist 48:59
He was 86.

Scott Harwood 49:01
And still singing with us.

Jim MacMillan 49:02
So we got this huge range, but what we don't want to do is start singing songs for the 15 year olds, that are not necessarily barbershop. [Griego: Yeah.] You know, we want the 15 year olds to love the barbershop.

Scott Harwood 49:19
The tight harmonies.

Jim MacMillan 49:20
What it is.

Elle Griego 49:21
Like songs that were written to be barbershop songs, really.

Jim MacMillan 49:26

But really, like somebody said, you could take any song, and we've had that done by one of our old directors, Mel, he's taken like "seven Bridges Road." Do you know that song by The Eagles, "Seven Bridges Road?"

Elle Griego 49:40
No, I'm not familiar.

Jim MacMillan 49:41
So it's a ton... we bought a barbershop arrangement, and it was really hard. So we said, "We can't do this." So we gave it to our old director, Mel, and said, "Can you fix this?" You know what we can do. And he basically dumbbed it down for us. And then Hall made tracks for us.

Butch Berquist 50:02
Well, the last one we did, though, was when we did the Alabama... the "Cheap Seats." Yeah, which is a baseball song. And I sent it to Mel. Mel Knight was... he was the head of the music department of the society for 15 years before he moved back to Oregon, and I told him about this song that we wanted, and I basically sent him to the YouTube of it. Three days later, he sent me the score, which I sent off to one of the guys that do the vocal tracks. And a week later, we came back with the tracks for all four parts, plus a mix, and we had the score, and we learned that song for...

Jim MacMillan 50:49
Yeah, there was no barbershop arrangement for "Cheap Seats."

Ed Phillips 50:52
Mel did that.

Jim MacMillan 50:54
Now we have it. So really, I mean, if the 15 year old said "I'd like to do this song. It's on the radio all the time, and everybody in our high school is singing it." Potentially, we could turn that into a barbershop arrangement.

Butch Berquist 51:09
There's two arrangers around. Mel has passed on, so has Chuck.

Scott Harwood 51:15
But, it's kind of like what you were saying, you're asking, do we want to preserve the old stuff? Well, yeah, I still listen to Bach and Rachmaninoff and Mozart. They're dead. The music is still fantastic. And a lot of the music being made today is really great music out there, a lot of the new pop stuff, there's some really great stuff. Some of it's going to hang around. Some of it's not. [Harwood laughs.] Some of it's going to make its way into barbershop. It's... yeah, I like singing good music, and I like seeing the old stuff. I like seeing some new stuff.

Butch Berquist 52:08
Years ago, we were at a contest, and Mel Knight's other quartet, the Cascade Connections. Were part of the thing, yeah, and they... [MacMillan flips his baseball cap around.] [Harwood laughs.] This is when rap music was first becoming popular nationwide. They come on stage, and Mel started talking about it, while the other three guys of his Quartet turned around, turned their hats around back or whatever. And for the next three and a half minutes, they did barbershop rap. There were chords, there were everything.

Ed Phillips 52:33
How cool.

Butch Berquist 52:34
They never sang it again. [Berquist and Harwood laugh.]

Jim MacMillan 52:39
I saw them sing it in Spokane, I think... somewhere I saw them. May have been a video, I'm not sure,

Butch Berquist 52:47
Could have been, yeah. So yeah, they proved to us that any music can get turned into a nice, singable barbershop arrangement. Some of them you don't want to. Now, I did send you Donal Bottema Pedersen's stuff. Yeah, on that email, I sent back her email connection.

Elle Griego 53:13
Oh, yeah, I'm gonna interview her and her father tomorrow, in fact.

Butch Berquist 53:25
Okay, good.

Jim MacMillan 53:26
Ron Bottema Pedersen?

Elle Griego 53:30
Donal... is it Pedersen? I'll be interviewing her.

Butch Berquist 53:35
Yeah, Donal, and who else?

Elle Griego 53:37
Just her and her father.

Butch Berquist 53:38
Just her, okay, if she can get you tied in with Pat McGowan. In fact, the West Side singers recently had their 80th reunion, and they invited a bunch of us alumni to sing, and we basically put on a 40 person alumni, three songs we all had to sing. Well, they all sat and watched us. But they have some of those folks that came on stage and some of the folks that are still singing with the West Side Singers, were there singing before I did. So you know, they got more history than I do. Donal can tie you into that. Get tied into her, for the contest, early contest, and Ballad Town, the whole... yeah, much more than we have, if they're still around. Her dad, I'm not sure his memory is still good enough to do.

Jim MacMillan 54:37
Is that Ron?

Butch Berquist 54:38

Ron Bottema, yeah. And in fact, Ron Alcott, who used to sing with us, he's more feeble now, he sang [unintelligible] he was there that day also. [Harwood: Cool]. So, yeah, there's some names. You'll have them on your... [Griego: Yeah.] Fun stuff.

Elle Griego 55:00

Yeah, well, I'm glad it seems that Ballad Town Harmony seems to be in a bit of an upswing. Do you hope to maintain that -- or we could kind of talk just about the future a little bit, but just kind of in terms of concluding thoughts, where do you hope everything goes these next few years?

Jim MacMillan 55:21

One of our challenges is we're finding that people want to sing and come be with us. We're not necessarily getting all great singers. And for years, we've been like, "You want to be in our group. Fine. You're in our group." We are a membership group, and there are a handful of people that are not... that have become members after six months. So we have to deal with that. Do we keep them around or do we say, let them go and then we shrink? So that's a challenge for sure. I guess we will know when that happens. His thing, Scott as director, he wants us to sound good, right? And Butch was the same when he was our director. But when you have a handful of singers that aren't doing their homework at home. It affects everybody else. I mean, I've used this analogy of like, playing football and half your linemen don't show up, you're going to be killed, right? [Griego: Yeah.] And when half of our singers don't show up prepared, it affects us. So that might affect our growth. Right now, we're kind of bringing people in, bringing people in, but at some point we gotta go, "Woah! Woah! Woah! Wait."

Butch Berquist 56:48

Sometimes you need to have something for them to look forward to. Christmas show, spring show, whatever. [MacMillan: Yeah.] And we're gonna do these 11 songs at the Spring Show.

Scott Harwood 56:55

And if you just listen to the words he just said, it sounds like we don't sound very good. [MacMillan: Yeah.] We do! [Harwood laughs.]

Jim MacMillan 57:11

We do.

Scott Harwood 57:11

The point he's making is more about membership, and we have a few if... once we get up to around 25, 30 people, we get enough people there that know the songs and can carry a lot of the other people. That's not as challenging. We started off at the beginning of the year with... we went from 10 people to 20 to 25 pretty rapidly. And most of the people that were... almost all of the new singers, hadn't been singing barbershop, hadn't even sung in a chorus in a very long time. And it's really easy to train people to sing better. For most people, like 90% of people out there, it's pretty easy to train them to sing pretty decent. It's not that hard if you put a little bit of effort into it. And we have so much fun that people just want to keep coming back, because it's an enjoyable experience to sing well, and if we, like Chuck said, or it used to be the motto of the Harmony Masters "Sing well and make them laugh." I mean that's... everywhere we go, everywhere we sing as quartets or as a chorus, people smile. I don't care if they're laughing at us or smiling because they're enjoying what we're doing, but singing well, and even the old stuff, it makes people smile, and we need more of that in our lives. Come sing with us and have some fun with us. Help us spread the joy of singing to other people. We'd love to have more people. It really is fun.

Jim MacMillan 59:10

And I second what you said, the words that I used may not have been correct, because we are singing. I mean, we are.

Scott Harwood 59:19

Yeah, the chorus sounds good. I am so astonished at how good we sound compared to that first week in January. It's really amazing.

Ed Phillips 59:31

They're very ambitious, I will say that.

Scott Harwood 59:32

Really are.

Ed Phillips 59:33

They're very hungry for this. So it's just two hours on Tuesday nights, and it goes so fast.

Scott Harwood 59:42

Last Tuesday, we were working on one song. We were working so hard at it, and everybody was so involved with it, we were an hour and 15 minutes into rehearsal, or more, almost an hour and a half into rehearsal before we took our break. It was supposed to be half way through, because nobody was lagging. There was no lack of energy, which you can feel. And everybody was just so into it. And we learned the song in two weeks, and we were singing the song really well. I was so astonished. Just an amazing group of people.

Elle Griego 1:00:19

Yeah, all right. Well, any more final final thoughts?

Ed Phillips 1:00:26

No.

Butch Berquist 1:00:27

The motto is, "Keep the whole world singing." And we keep trying.

Ed Phillips 1:00:34

Yeah.

Elle Griego 1:00:35

Absolutely. Well, thank you so much for being here! This was wonderful, a very insightful interview.

Jim MacMillan 1:00:40

Thank you so much.