

SONGFEST 2003

- A memorable afternoon

By Grant Knox

We all had June 4, 2003 circled on our calendars for weeks. The note from **Bob Burrell** proclaiming *SONGFEST 2003* arrived in February. Let me explain from my view as an alumnus, that is, someone who had previously attended a SONGFEST, what it is like on this afternoon presented by *Ontario's Loyal and Devoted Fraternity of Active Retired Tonsorial Singers*.

The SONGFEST mission statement reads, "Encouraging senior Barbershoppers to keep singing and performing for the enrichment of themselves, their audiences and their favorite charities." How fitting!

A reunion tone of SPEBSQSA members quickly emerged at Milliken Mills Community Centre in Markham as many attending only see each other at annual Songfests. The opportunity to shake hands and play catch-up with long-term Barbershoppers is indeed precious.

The organizing committee, with capable help from the *Suburbanaires* and the *Barons of Barbershop*, was responsible for seeing that Songfest would be a pleasant memory. They more than met their expectations.

Now to the afternoon. Almost all of those singing have appeared in the competitive atmosphere, but this venue is for sheer entertainment. Over 75 different songs were performed by various quartets, VLQs and singing senior choruses coming from Barrie, Brampton, Etobicoke, Port Colborne, Markham, St. Thomas, Kitchener-Waterloo, Oakville, Cambridge, Scarborough and Oshawa. What a feast for a groupie like myself. I was told 116 had registered to sing at Songfest in addition to 21 non-performers.

Thanks to those putting the word out, a number of Ontario Barbershoppers were attending their first Songfest.

Making their debut were the *Royal Rascals*, *Timbretones* and a dynamic quartet aptly named *Old Friends*. Special recognition was given to the *Country Four* for their fifty years of singing together with the same personnel, and to **Roy Keys** for his many contributions to senior Barbershoppers and to Songfest.

Being taught and being directed by **Jim Rehill**, **John Anderson**, **Roy Keys**, **Bruce Bonnyman**, **Ron Whiteside** and **Ted McAlpine** is a reminder to all how fortunate we are to receive their musical know how.

Everyone probably received something different from this fine afternoon of singing, but for me the memory of **George Shields** teaching us the "Barbershop Grace" before our fine dinner will remain.

As well, hearing various quartetters singing while we approached the buffet table was delightful. What a neat way to close Songfest with **Milt Rainey** and **Roy Keys** directing all of us in our two signature songs.

I hear that *SONGFEST 2004* is now being planned for *Wednesday, June 2, 2004* at the same excellent location, and you can be sure that I'll be making every effort to be there. 🍁



Photo — Waldo Redekop

At Songfest 2003, the *Country Four* were presented with plaques commemorating their 50 years of singing together as a quartet, with the same personnel. 🍁

The Country Four

By Roy Keys

The name says it all, up to a point. There are now five of them because when one goes to Florida, the fifth takes his place.

The original four started 53 years ago when they played in a dance band. And, they are still together as members of the *Oshawa Horseless Carriagemen*.

They'll sing at the drop of a hat anywhere, anytime. If people insist on paying them, the money goes to charity.

They exemplify what barbershopping is, or used to be all about — a hobby! Hobby is what our founders meant it to be. I have great respect for Barbershoppers who do not profit from their hobby, except for the satisfaction that they get in pleasing their listeners.

The original four in the *Country Four* were **Don Staples**, **Jack Allin**, **Glen Allin** and **Gerald Brown**. Gerald soon left for college and brother **Merrill** stepped in. When Merrill started going to Florida, **Merv Scott** took his place until he came back. That's brotherhood for you.

The *Country Four* were featured on the *Oshawa Chapter Show* this year, along with the chorus and *Northern Highlights*. Bless 'em all! 🍁



Photo — Waldo Redekop

Suburbanaires, under the direction of **Milt Rainey**, entertaining at Songfest 2003. 🍁