

Cheshiremen Chorus Honors Stalwart Member

The singing members of the **Keene Chapter of the Barbershop Harmony Society “Cheshiremen Chorus”** began last year 2020 just like everyone else. The future looked bright and promising.

In early January, the members, spouses, and friends met for their annual formal dinner and meeting, installing new officers and presenting awards to individuals honoring exceptional service to the chapter—and singing. Their annual Singing Valentines program followed in February with great success. They were preparing for their 68th Annual Show for May—a jukebox retrospective-themed event with all-new, favorite, popular songs. Then, COVID hit. Everything shut down—with the choral and singing communities hit especially hard, just like so many of the performing arts.

Their response at first was like so many. “Zooming” started. But you cannot sing together in a Zoom meeting. They looked at other technologies. Nothing worked to allow singing together digitally. After months of singing alone at home, or “on-mute,” something needed to give.

In early June 2020, the Cheshiremen met and resumed singing together, social-distancing and masked, in Keene’s Wells Street Parking Garage. Even though the space offered great acoustics, it was challenging. The environment was noisy (even loud birds chirping to the music). Wearing any mask is hot and muffled, and gasping for a big breath to sing is difficult. But they persevered - they just wanted to sing – and together. They met every two weeks through the summer and fall – right into November, when they finally succumbed to the cold and wind (heavy coats, hats, and gloves, too). There were, of course, no performances and the future was so uncertain. Back to home Zoom meetings all winter.

After the winter of these non-singing Zoom meetings (they were member and family check-ins at best) the men resumed rehearsals in April 2021 at the Parking Garage setting. Doing their best to keep their repertoire alive and well. Short in duration, the singing just felt so good to them.

Now, with COVID restrictions lifted and so many vaccinated, the Cheshiremen have resumed in-person rehearsals, indoors, while masked and separated for now, singing new and old songs – together again in perfect harmony – ringing the famous barbershop chords!

At that first April 2021 rehearsal at the Garage, a spontaneous, surprising presentation was made. Because so much had been different in 2020, no one expected to resume anything normal. At a break in the singing, **Casper Bemis** of Marlborough, stepped up to the “podium” and read an eloquent statement about the past year and how we have all persevered. *“Twenty-twenty was a year that the word ‘unique’ doesn’t begin to describe, ...”* he began.

Casper continued reflecting on the past year, and ended... *“I would argue that few social organizations have suffered more this past year than choruses, and perhaps especially barbershop choruses. Because of that, I think it is especially important this year to acknowledge and honor someone who has been our shining light of hope and optimism this past year; who has been steadfast in his commitment and taken it upon himself to keep this group together, in multiple ways, until happy days are here again. (I think there is a song in there somewhere.) I would argue that there has never been a greater need than to honor, this year, a (Keene chapter) member with the Barbershopper of the Year award (BOTY) and that individual is Steve Salamin.”*

Steve was standing in the back row of singers in the Garage and was simply astounded and surprised by the award – it was a well-kept secret. “Thank you, guys ... I don’t ‘do this’ for the awards and the accolades...” he responded. “I do this for the REward – a very different kind of recognition - what it brings to me and you, and what it provides for all men and women, for our community, and for how singing brings health and healing, joy and comfort to all.”

Steve is a 21-year member of the Barbershop Harmony Society and Keene chapter. He is the current Keene chapter VP of Marketing and well as serving the greater Northeastern District as VP of Marketing and

Communications. This is his second Keene Barbershopper of the Year award, the first awarded for 2003. Steve was also awarded Northeastern District Barbershopper of the Year in 2013. Last year, Steve was presented with the first-ever Keene chapter "Dino Houpis Memorial Award" for his exceptional, persistent service to the chapter and community around barbershop harmony. Steve works in the creative marketing industry, providing pre-press print production, business development and communications consulting. He lives in Keene with his wife, Abby. Congratulations, Steve!

Indeed, happier days are here. The Cheshiremen Chorus is pleased to announce they have resumed indoor singing on Tuesday evenings in their usual location at **Hannah Grimes Center** at 25 Roxbury Street in Keene, beginning at 6:30 PM. Please note that guests need to be fully vaccinated. And they are maintaining distancing while singing, for now. It is a huge relief to be back – the room is quiet and air-conditioned! New singers and old barbershop buddies are welcome to join them any Tuesday night. There are no auditions, just voice placement. If you can sing 'Happy Birthday' - well, you're ready to sing and learn barbershop harmony! The chapter provides learning resources to make it easy and fun.

More awards, meetings, events and singing information - including newly booked performances for this summer - can be found on their web site:

<http://www.cheshiremen.org> or call **1-877-31B-SHOP**