

The Chapter-Driven District

The initiative to create a new district of the Barbershop Harmony Society was provided by a task force of approximately ten men over a period of three years. The task force developed a resolution seeking a new district that would be comprised of the chapters in North Carolina and South Carolina. This act would divide the then-existing Dixie District into two smaller districts of similar size. This resolution was shared with all chapters of the Dixie District for their consideration. The Carolina chapters voted unanimously to adopt the resolution as did a majority of the non-Carolina chapters in the Dixie District. This unanimous support for the resolution by the chapters of the Carolinas provided the power and strength that finally carried the day and resulted in the creation of the Carolinas District of the Barbershop Harmony Society.

During that three year effort, the presidents of the Carolinas chapters came together in meetings with the task force members, first to discuss and debate the advisability of creating a new district, and then to determine just what the nature of the new district would be, should it be created.

Day-long facilitated meetings of the district chapter presidents and task force members were held in Florence, SC and Winston-Salem, NC that resulted in the creation of a set of values, a vision, and a mission statement that would guide the new district. The bottom line of these documents was the involvement of the chapters in the functioning and operation of the district. A term that was coined to describe the concept was a “chapter driven” district.

Just what “chapter driven district” means is a work in process. The Board of Directors and the House of Delegates are required to continuously test their proposed actions against the District Values, Vision and Mission Statement to insure legitimacy and consistency of operations.

As the Carolinas District (NSC) was created, we had twenty seven chapters and 741 members. The health of the chapters ranged from vigorous to comatose. The first efforts of the District were to reach out to the small non-functioning chapters to attempt resuscitation. A major effort was undertaken at West Jefferson, NC that included a community-wide campaign aided greatly by the local Arts Council. A show was presented to demonstrate to the community just what can be accomplished with male acapella singing. More than fifty barbershoppers from across the district travelled to the mountains on a winter Saturday to present a terrific show that included the North Carolina Harmony Brigade and four district quartets. Seven local men signed up at the concert to join the five local members and attempt to grow the chapter. The District supplied a director who provided voice lessons and basic barbershop singing to these men. It was a hopeful start that eventually failed for lack of a capable local director. Three of the original twenty seven chapters were terminated for lack of members.

On the other hand, a new chapter was formed and chartered in Mount Pleasant, SC; the Savannah chapter petitioned to join the Carolinas and was accepted and another new group is licensed in

Brunswick County, NC getting us back about where we started but with some very healthy new chapters coming along.

The Carolinas District is dedicated to helping chapters that would like some assistance. A chapter is the controller of its destiny. Each chapter is different and charts its own course. The District attempts to make known to the chapters the kind of help that is available, but only provides that help when it is requested by the chapter leadership.

The Carolinas District settled on three initiatives early on that have the potential of strengthening chapters. The first initiative was a meaningful Leadership Academy. The thing that makes any job difficult is “not knowing how to do it”. Every year we have elections in the chapters to choose next year’s leaders. Many of the men elected do not know the responsibilities of their position, and/or how to execute those responsibilities. We encourage all chapter officers to attend the Leadership Academy to bring better job performance to the chapter from each office. Attendance has been very good and the curriculum is improved every year.

The second initiative for chapter support is assistance in the creation of an annual plan for the chapter. Most chapters wish to improve. Improvement is rarely accomplished without a plan. A process that involves all chapter members in a facilitated fact gathering session has proven to be very valuable for many chapters. This process provides excellent data regarding the wants and needs of the chapter members and lays down the foundation for the creation of a meaningful annual plan for the chapter. Twenty one men from across the district took a course where they learned how to facilitate these meetings at chapters and they are ready to go where needed to provide these services.

The third initiative is the “5th Man Team”. Our quartets use a “5th man” to coach them to better performance. We reasoned that “coaching” could be helpful to the chapter leadership. The skills required for this effort often exceed the knowledge and experience of one individual, so we put together a team consisting of a music expert, an experienced administrative member, and an experienced barbershopper. This three man team (5th Man Team) works for the chapter board of directors as “coaches” to help chapter leaders do a better job for the chapter. About thirty outstanding barbershoppers from the district have volunteered to be coaches. These men attended an all day session at the 2012 Leadership Academy to learn the process, and they are being task-organized to support chapters across the district.

It will take a few years to determine if the Values, Vision, and Mission Statement that were developed by a group of concerned barbershoppers contain the right stuff to perpetuate this wonderful hobby of ours. If the Carolinas District is successful, we will help preserve this unique American Art form for future generations. This was a sincere desire of those concerned barbershop leaders who came together to hammer out their idea of a better way to run a district.