



Enthusiasm and energy outdo perfect pitch anytime, yet, don't think because not all members of the Cowboy Capital Chorus are trained musicians their talent is any less. The group has received rave reviews during its local and regional performances, and its members have fun.

Dale Wee, who joined the barbershop chorus soon after it formed in 2001, said when he first started he never wanted to sing in front of an audience and never wanted to perform in a show.

Director Susan Kelton said the group formed in 2001 when Scott Shurman, who had sung barbershop in another location, moved to Ogallala. When the group started, there were nine members, Kelton said. Now, 12 years later, there are more than 25.

The group is part of the Barbershop Harmony Society, an international organization of more than 25,000 men dedicated to preserving the barbershop style of singing. Barbershop singing is distinguished by four-part a capella harmony.

"Originally, song harmonies were improvised wherever men gathered, often, indeed the barbershop," Kelton said.

Kelton said almost any song can be arranged in barbershop style.

While Kelton has been director since 2002, Donna Johnson, who had been a Sweet Adeline director, helped the group get started and continues to write show scripts and coach during shows.

While Shurman is no longer with the group, Steve Schwartzkopf, who was one of the founding members, still is active.

"He's our 'go-to' guy," Kelton said. Wee said Shurman encouraged him to join the group. "I sang along with the radio, things like that, but I had never formally sung four-part harmony," Wee said. "I didn't think I could do it."

Schwartzkopf, who grew up in a musical family and had played the guitar since the eighth grade, said he always liked to sing. So, when he learned of the barbershop chorus, he was excited to join.

Kelton said the Cowboy Capital Chorus offers the amateur singer an excellent opportunity to

improve his abilities. “There are area workshops and classes, as well as competitions for those who are interested in that,” Kelton said. Schwartzkopf and Wee agree: it is not as important how one sings but that one loves to sing.

They said the group always is seeking new members, and a lack of musical training should not be a roadblock. Wee said the pitch pipe gets them started and they have learned to “sing by ear.” “You just learn to harmonize by doing,” he said.

Kelton said the group’s mission is to provide quality entertainment and to support the vocal music programs in the area. They also give back to the community by entertaining at fundraisers, community celebrations and singing at churches.

Wee said it is not just the singing that makes the group successful but also the sense of camaraderie and friendship. “That’s a very big part of this group,” Wee said. Schwartzkopf agreed. “Having fun’s a big part of it,” he said.

The group’s members are dedicated and the Tuesday evening practices are productive. “We have extraordinary participation, way above average for barbershop groups, and we’re growing,” Wee said. Group members come from Ogallala, Arthur, Brule, Grant, Madrid, Venango, North Platte and Holyoke, Colo.

While men are encouraged to simply attend a Tuesday night practice, which begins at 7 p.m. in the Ogallala Congregational Church, those who want to know more about the group can contact Hansen, membership vice president, at (308) 352- 4123.

“If you enjoy music, barbershopping might be for you,” Wee said. “You don’t audition. Just come on in.”

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