

The Troub



Enriching lives through singing and serving local communities



PIONEER DISTRICT NEWSLETTER

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Pioneer District President

Designing a New Path Forward

Living with frozen tundras, green elephants and “When”

Greetings from the frozen tundra of central Michigan. (In the voice of [John Facenda](#).) While it is a bit uncomfortable to be outdoors right now, I find myself looking forward to the thaw ... actually, two thaws. The first is the certain thaw that comes every April, the one that can be messy and made up of fits and spurts of nice weather one day and a blizzard the next. The other thaw is certain, too, and also will feature fits and spurts. I am referring to getting back to singing. Let's talk about that elephant in the room.



My elephant is lime green like a MountainTown Singer, has a big black hooped earring and a polka dot necktie. Hard to miss. His name is When. As in when will we be singing together again?! My answer is when each person in the room has weighed the risk and made a decision that considers their personal health, the health of their household, their extended family and friends and even co-workers. That is a lot of responsibility, and each of us will get to that point one day, on our own timeline.



My assessment of the current situation concludes the answer is “not quite yet.” I read everything I can find on COVID. Both sides of the issue and the medical information from multiple sources. I find hope for the future of singing together, but again, not quite yet.

It appears that even as vaccines are being administered, the policies of masking, social distancing, frequent hand washing and limited gathering sizes will remain in place at some level for most if not all of 2021. Initial gatherings among barbershoppers will certainly feature some or all of these safeguards. Each group of barbershoppers will need to agree on such items as they get started with some of their members and then add others as the personal comfort level increases. I do not expect to “flip the switch” and have all be like it was a year ago.

Things are not like they were a year ago; nor are we. These two facts need to be considered as

we plan for a return to singing. I set in motion the idea that we need to be planning a PATH FORWARD in last month's Troub. I hope you have started that process or will soon. I suggest you identify something to work on together to generate interest and engagement among your members. Find something to get some energy going.

For me and my chapter, that something is Harmony Explosion 2021. Don't get me wrong. We aren't just dusting off the 9-year-old playbook. We're thinking outside the box and making decisions that position us to adapt the event as the date nears and conditions dictate what can or can't be done. We are months behind our normal planning process, but we will make up the ground. It is worth the effort. And honestly, it feels good to be doing something productive in the barbershop world.

I was asked recently about the district or BHS providing a waiver for an audience to sign prior to a performance. That question alone means people recognize performing for an audience right now is risky. The district is not willing or able to create such an instrument. That would be a BHS endeavor and one they would certainly run past legal counsel and their insurance carrier. You can imagine, like I have, that it's most likely a non-starter.

Enough COVID.

I hope you have checked out [the updated district website](#). It is a work in progress, and we'll be adding content, filling in the calendar as we can and hosting useful information there in the coming months. Let's take a look at the About section and the Contact item in the About drop-down menu. You can use these buttons to:

- [Contact the district president](#)
- [Report the passing of a member](#)
- [Report an issue on the website](#)

These buttons open a form to be completed and forwarded to the appropriate district person.

I attended the BHS Midwinter Convention two weekends ago. It was hard to get excited about another Zoom meeting, but I'm here to tell you: It was NOT a Zoom meeting. It was much more. It was great fun. I was able to catch up with old friends in person, kind of. I sat in some inspiring education sessions and the shows were off-the-charts good. The most inspirational items were keynote speeches by Keving Keller and Blair Brown. I've linked to those below for your convenience. I suggest you make time to watch them both.

- [Kevin Keller Keynote](#)

- [Blair Brown Keynote](#)

I'll leave you with well wishes — my wish for your success with plans for 2021 and [this little video from Midwinter](#). Think lime green elephant with a necktie.

Be well, my friends!

Joe

Read previous president updates by [CLICKING HERE](#)

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Insights on the return to singing

Cherry Capital Men's Chorus president, an infectious disease epidemiologist, weighs in

As vaccination against COVID-19 progresses, the Pioneer District continues to encourage chapters, choruses and quartets to shape their plans for a return to singing.

“With people so hungry for social interaction, it’s time to plan how we’ll move forward and start to generate excitement,” Pioneer President Joe McDonald said. “If we wait, we’ll miss an unparalleled opportunity to create community.”



The district’s role isn’t to declare when it’s safe to sing again; that is up to individual chapters and singers. However, McDonald said the district will share educational resources and insights such as those cited here from Roger Racine, president of the Cherry Capital Men’s Chorus and

an infectious disease epidemiologist for the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services.

We're also following that with information from the Mayo Clinic about vaccines.

Personal thoughts from Roger (speaking on his own, not as a representative of the state):

- Vaccination could be a silver bullet for a return to singing. There's light at the end of a long tunnel; we're just unsure how fast we're traveling. I urge caution. Be patient as the vaccine is administered. It appears highly safe and effective, and we can anticipate a decline in cases with the onset of herd immunity.
- Once we all have the chance to receive the vaccine, the government's responsibility to protect people will be met and I expect the limits of this past year to be lifted.
- Singing requires air to be forced from deep within our lungs. Early in the pandemic, we recognized the extreme risk of infection from group singing. I can't condone such risky activity unless folks have been documented as infected and recovered or vaccinated.
- Consider starting to plan summer practices and smaller-scale performances for this fall and winter. Start planning membership drives and fundraising, too, and know that we need all hands on deck to implement such efforts.
- One possibility is to start live rehearsals with quartets of vaccinated members.
- Choruses could band together to share ideas and strategies for recruitment/retention and fundraising. Let's limit the times we reinvent the wheel!

Vaccine information from the [Mayo Clinic](#):

It takes about two weeks for your body to build up protection after both doses of a COVID-19 vaccine. Even then, you could become infected. The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is 95% effective in preventing COVID-19. The Moderna vaccine is 94% effective. While your risk of getting COVID-19 after being vaccinated is low, it is possible.

It's not clear if the vaccines reduce the spread of COVID-19. It's not known if a person who is vaccinated could be a carrier and spread the virus to others, even if he or she doesn't become sick. More research is needed to determine if you can be contagious after being vaccinated.

Andrew Badley, M.D., Mayo's COVID-19 Research Task Force Chair, [notes you should get vaccinated even if you've had COVID-19](#). He said the duration of immunity received from having COVID-19 varies. Current estimates are that it goes away over about three months — which is why the vaccine is recommended.

UnConventional 2 — We promise you'll love it!

Save the date: April 23-25

The Pioneer District's UnConventional 2 is slated April 23-25. This free virtual event promises to provide lots of digital camaraderie, learning and yes, even singing in some creative ways.

Pioneer's own **Brandon Smith** will deliver the keynote presentation — **"Barbershop in 2021: The path forward."** Smith is a district board member and choir director at Bedford Junior High and High School. His barbershop honors include 2019 District Chorus Champion, 2018 Next Generation Varsity Youth Quartet Champion, and 2015 District Quartet Champion.

Smith also will host a follow-up session about adapting chapter culture to keep pace with the dynamics of a post Covid-19 environment.

Additional topics include:

1. *Tips for making great multitracks - Rob Petigrew*
2. *Car-Bershopping: What's it all about - Pete Stephens-Brown*
3. *AHSOW: Join in on some woodshedding - Pete Stephens-Brown*
4. *Music Selection and Music Reading Session: Finding appropriate music for your group – Brandon Smith*
5. *Iconic Barbershop Performances - Cody Harrell*
6. *How to host a reflective dialogue session - Cody Harrell/BHS Staff*

Shhh... It's somewhat of a surprise, but plans are underway for a 60- to 90-minute show on Saturday!

The first UnConventional, in November, drew more than 100 participants and received rave reviews:

*"Got to see many folks I have not seen in a long time! Learned more things to do with Zoom to support chapter get-togethers." -- **Chuck Murray, Rochester and Pontiac chapters***

*"It felt like sitting in a room with friends." -- **Tom Ennis, Grand Rapids and Mount Pleasant chapter***

Although participation in UnConventional 2 is free, you'll still want to register — and those details are coming in March!

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Let's build Pioneer's digital library



Calling all Pioneers! If you have videos and recordings of Pioneer district, chapter chorus and quartet events prior to 1996, we'd love to digitize them and add them to a Pioneer District YouTube page. District board member Chris Berry has the capability to digitize VHS and DVD recordings and welcomes all submissions. All recordings will be returned in short order. Email Chris at techberry@charter.net.

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Catch a glimpse of life as it should be



Just do it. Watch the whole video. We dare you to not be smiling like it's the first 60-degree day of 2021! Best wishes on your debut album, Half and Half!

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