



# THE THOUSAND ISLANDERS CHORUS

## Singing with Friends

By Brenda Visser

In a city filled with excellent musical talent, the Thousand Islanders Chorus is no exception. If you walked into the basement of one of Brockville's downtown churches on a Wednesday evening, you would be treated to the sound of topnotch voices singing energizing music. This all-female barbershop ensemble with membership averaging around 25 has won regional awards, and it is easy to understand why.

Under the quality direction of Stuart MacMartin, the ladies learn new pieces of (tenor lead) music and soon memorize them, performing with no musical score in front of them. With no music to hold in their hands, their bodies are free to move with the music, giving greater expression and nuance to the mood and emotion of what they are singing. They are "ordinary women making extraordinary music", said Debbie Gay, Public Relations Coordinator.

The Thousand Islanders Chorus has been performing for over 40 years. It is filled with

volunteers who love to sing, whether they can read music or not. It is non-profit, only requiring dues for sheet music, hall rentals and the Director honorarium. They love to be involved in the community and show this by singing at nursing homes, churches, New Year's Eve concerts, Christmas events, parades and more.

One interesting thing that is encouraged in the Chorus is the formation of smaller quartets. Having the smaller groups helps strengthen the Chorus as a whole. The FourTune Seekers, for example, has been together for a decade and is available for hire to sing at your events, such as anniversaries, birthdays, or luncheons. Their wide repertoire of songs include ballads, show tunes or gospel songs. There are also other quartets who perform in various capacities. What a great idea for your next event!

Participating in the Brockville Lion's Club Music Festival in April, the Thousand

Islanders Chorus received a gold medal standing- a high standard that is not simple to reach. Bravo!

The Chorus is currently a member in the international barbershop group, Harmony, Inc., and participates in annual competitions and contests. The competition is strong, and if they place in the top 20 standings, they are happy, said Gay. Recently, they won the Small Chorus award for our region, and also won an award for the Most Improved Chorus. When a group qualifies for these awards, often times they also qualify for international competition. Obviously, a lot of hard work and dedication goes into these achievements, and their future looks bright.

At Christmas 2014, for the first time, the Chorus hosted a Christmas tea, which was a resounding success. Their holiday attire was appealing as well, with black tops and bottoms, and a white scarf secured with a miniature silk poinsettia flower. They were Victorian Carollers in downtown Brockville, and donned Victorian clothing, loaned by the Brockville Museum.

During the year, the good cheer of the Chorus does not end with their singing. They contribute to local charities in various ways. For Christmas 2014, they helped a family through the Salvation Army, ensuring that the family would have gifts, toys, and food for Christmas. Previously, they gave to Family & Children Services and other organizations. Annually, they donate to a family or organization that is challenged by the needs of an autistic child. One year they gave a laptop computer to a school in this generous effort.

Any women who love to sing are invited to join the ladies on the risers. The ability to read music is an asset, but not a requirement. Practices are in downtown Brockville on Wednesday evenings from 7-9pm, and performances occur throughout the year. Contact Sue McCloskey, Membership Coordinator, for more information at 613-865-7638.

It is worthwhile to check out the Thousand Islander's website as well, at <http://www.thousandislanders.com/>. It is full of current, detailed information not necessarily included in this article.

Should you choose to join this group, or simply listen to their next performance, you will walk away with a warm feeling. Friendship and teamwork is strong among these ladies, and it shows. As Debbie Gay says, "The only thing better than singing, is singing with friends." LH