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The Northern Lights Shine in Song

Peggy Braden joins local choral group as new director

By Jim Akans



Northern Lights new director, Peggy Braden (at left) leads the group during a recent rehearsal. Photo by Jim Akans

Back in 1996, eight women from the Gaylord area met to discuss the idea of forming a ladies barbershop chorus, and the following January, the Northern Lights group was officially formed. By June of 1998, with several performances already under their belts, Sweet Adelines International accepted the Northern Lights as a prospective new chapter. The songstresses were given their official charter with Sweet Adelines International in June 2001, comprising 22 members and becoming the 22nd chapter in Region 2.

Throughout the group's celebrated history, Northern Lights have performed at countless events and special occasions in the northern Lower Michigan area. The sweet, four-part a cappella harmonies have been finely tuned over the years through skills honed at various workshops and conventions, and by director Cheryl Wagner, who led the group until April of this year.

Bringing a lifetime filled with musical experience, Peggy Braden has recently joined the Northern Lights as the ensemble's new director. Braden began studying voice, piano and violin at a young age, having been raised in a home environment brimming with musical talent.

"I have always enjoyed singing," she relates. "My mother and father were very musical and I listened to all kinds of music while growing up. I have always loved vocal harmony, and I remember singing duets with my sister in church, and singing all the way through school."

She received a Master of Music degree at the University of Michigan's School of Music, travelled extensively throughout Europe and the former USSR on a State Department sponsored cultural exchange tour, and performed at musical theatre and operetta performances at the Ann Arbor Civic Theatre, Comic Opera guild, and the Corsicana Warehouse Theatre.

In addition to singing professionally, Braden has directed adult and children's choirs, taught music at the preschool, graded school, high school and college levels, and founded her own private voice studio while living in Santa Barbara County, California.

However, Braden is not new to the Gaylord area. In the 1980's she was Choir Director at the First United Methodist Church. In the 1990's she was Music Director of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church and also served as full time Chaplain with Hospice of Michigan.

Braden's new adventure as director of the Northern Lights began to unfold after attending a fundraiser for the Gaylord Chamber Orchestra. Word about her extensive musical background reached the right set of ears, and a short time later she was asked if she would be interested in leading the Northern Lights, and she readily accepted.

"The Northern Lights are a such a wonderful group of singers and people," Braden affirms. "No matter what else happens to be going on in their lives, they enjoy coming and singing with the group every week. It truly lifts the spirits. We are also a very social organization, but we do work hard and are committed to what we do."

The Northern Lights are looking for new members to join them in song. The group rehearses every Tuesday evening from 6:30 to 9 pm at the Trinity Lutheran Church on South Otsego Avenue in Gaylord.

Braden notes, "If you love to sing and share special friendships, come and give us a try. If you have friends who love to sing, bring them along. Help us share this gift with each other and the community."

The Northern Lights are planning a Christmas show at the Evangelical Free Church in Gaylord on December 11th at 7 pm. It is a unique presentation in that the group is presenting this concert with two other Sweet Adeline choruses, one from West Branch and one from Hale. There is no admission fee for the event, though donations will be accepted for the Friendship Shelter.

Those interested in joining the Northern Lights call Cathy Cherup (989) 732-1676.