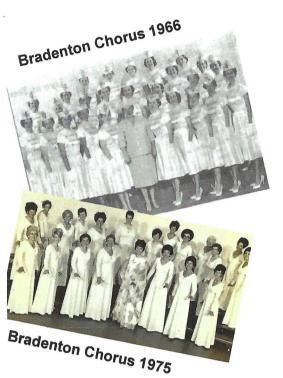
THE MAGIC OF MANATEE SWEET ADELINES CHORUS... SIXTY-FIVE YEARS AND COUNTING!

The Early Years (1957-1975)

In 1956, 11 years after Sweet Adelines was founded, the first meeting of Sweet Adelines in Bradenton, Florida, was held. About 25 vocalists attended this meeting. The next year, on May 1, 1957, the Bradenton Chapter of Sweet Adelines, under the direction of Sam Stahl, was granted its charter. In November of 1970, 13 years after the first Bradenton chapter was founded, a second chapter of Sweet Adelines, The Friendly City Chapter, was formed under the direction of Hy Gladhill.



As everyone knows, performing at chorus competitions is just a normal part of being a Sweet Adeline, and the Bradenton Chapter was no different. In 1963 the chorus placed third in the regional contest, and six years later, in 1969, they placed fourth. In 1974, both Bradenton chapters competed at the regional contest held in Atlanta. It was the first competition for members of the Friendly City Chapter. The Bradenton Chapter, with 27 voices under the direction of Mrs. William Siples, came in eighth place overall. The Friendly City Chorus, with 19 voices under the direction of Ed Hinkley, won first Place Small Chorus and thirteenth place overall.



As everyone *also* knows, wearing costumes is a normal part of being a Sweet Adeline. The costumes worn by the Bradenton Chapter were described as "flowing yellow gowns with wide motoring hats delicately tied with chiffon." The costumes worn by the Friendly City Chapter, on the other hand, sounded a bit more unusual in that they were described as "blue and white bathing suits from the 1800s." The competition photo shows members wearing dark stockings with the costume, but NO shoes!

Magic of Manatee Chorus (1975-Present)

In October 1975, the Bradenton and Friendly City Chapters of Sweet Adelines, under the direction of Ed Hinkley, consolidated to become the Magic of Manatee Chorus. This newly formed chorus competed for the first time at the regional contest in 1976. At the time, it was the largest chorus in the Atlantic Gulf Region. At this contest, the Magic of Manatee won third place out of 17 competing choruses. The following year, in March of 1977, the new chorus came in second place, and in 1978 the chorus won fourth place out of 22 competing choruses.

In April of 1976, the first annual show of this newly formed chorus was held at Neel Auditorium. Tickets cost \$4.00 and \$5.00. The Bron's Tones, the 1971 Sweet Adelines Quartet Champions, were the featured guest quartet. Betty Luckett (Meinholz), a member of the quartet, would later become an Associate Director of the chorus.

Lee Frayer, a 50+ year member of the Barbershop Harmony Society and a member of the Florida Sunshine District Hall of Fame, directed the Magic of Manatee chorus for several years in the 1980s. Lois Van Beek followed Lee as director, and to date she is the longest-serving director of the Magic of Manatee. Lois joined Sweet Adelines in 1971 and became the director of the chorus in 1988. She continued to direct the chorus for the next 30 years. In 2003, under Lois's direction, the chorus earned both the second Place Mid-Size Chorus award and the Most Improved Chorus award. In the years 2014, 2015, and 2016, the Magic of Manatee chorus

MAGIC OF MANATEE (Cont.)

competed in the Open Division category, winning the Audience Choice award each year. In 2017 and 2018 the chorus continued to compete in the Open Division, winning the Bravo award both years.

During her tenure with the chorus, Lois earned the Sweet Adelines "Certified Director" distinction. In 2003, she was recognized as Most Improved Director at the regional competition. Among her many achievements, Lois started a Young Girls in Harmony chorus at her school for girls in grades 4 through 8. In 2019, she stepped down as director but continued to sing with the chorus. Sadly, she passed away in 2021 after contracting COVID.

Replacing Lois as director in 2019 was Stephen Ditchfield, the highly-respected head of The Ditchfield Family Singers and the bass in the 2003 Florida State Championship Barbershop Quartet, My Three Sons. Stephen skillfully guided us through our 2020 sold-out annual show, and then---COVID ARRIVED. It would be three years before our chorus was able to perform another annual show under his able direction. Our biggest concern brought on by COVID was how we were going to be able to survive as a chorus when face-to-face rehearsals were no longer allowed.

The Little Chorus That Could (2020-2022)

The COVID years, 2020 through 2022, had to be the most challenging of our 65 years as a chorus. None of us had ever lived through a global pandemic before, let alone managed a chorus during one. By focusing on the things we COULD do as a chorus instead of the things we couldn't, over time we figured out how to hold meaningful rehearsals virtually. Surviving this dark chapter, when many choruses our size didn't, is one of our chapter's proudest accomplishments.

The Future Looks Bright (2023 & Beyond)

After four years as our director, Stephen Ditchfield, let us know that he had decided to focus on other pursuits and asked that we start the search for a new director. In July of 2023, it was our good fortune to hire Janice Wagner. Janice earned a Bachelor of Arts in Vocal Music from Bowling Green State University. She has extensive experience singing in and directing vocal groups, including Sweet Adeline choruses. We are pleased to say that our future continues to look bright under her guidance. The Magic of Manatee chorus is currently working on its 2024 competition music, and our show committee is well underway with plans for our 2024 Annual Show on March 9, 2024, at the Neel Performing Arts Center with our featured guest quartet, the Humdingers.

Yes, the Magic of Manatee chorus has changed a lot in 65 years. And yet a lot remains the same...like the pride that comes with being known as a Sweet Adeline...or the joy that comes while learning to master the craft of a capella singing, or the thrill of sharing beautiful music with others through performance. And it's our hope we'll be able to continue making our own special brand of "magic" for years to come.

