



The Bridge



Connecting Members of the Auburn Knights Alumni Association

VOL. XIII NUMBER I, OCTOBER, 2011

Another AKA Reunion for the Ages

Another year, another outstanding Auburn Knights reunion! How about the fantastic start to this year's band lineup by the 40's band? The radio show concept was stellar! My only regret was their selection of tunes ended all too soon.

As we've learned to expect every year, all the bands played great and, as usual, the current band superbly capped the weekend's music with another terrific closing set. Like AU's football Tigers, the current band is losing several key players. So, while it may be a rebuilding year in some ways, I'm looking forward to hearing the band's new musical chemistry.

Not to sound like a broken record but I'd like to shout out another resounding thank you to Charlie Higgins for all the work he does as our reunion coordinator! Without a doubt, his planning of our annual get together is a labor of love for Charlie. Nevertheless, it's a labor for which I am incredibly appreciative. Let me add another shout out to our spouse volunteers Ann Phillips, Judy Bailey, Sally Byrd, Karen Blaise and Mary Siler as well as Nat Michelson and Wade Johnson for working the registration table. Nice job!

I'd also like to offer my heartfelt thank you to our departing board members and an equally heartfelt welcome to our five new board members, John Norton, Jack Drescher, Ralph Black, Woody Leonard, and Andy Duke. I am also glad to know that outgoing board member Paul McCracken will be remaining with the AKA in his new role as co-historian with Charlie Kinzer.

If you have any leads on possible AKO gigs, please drop a note to the current band's business manager, Chris Rose, at:

rosechr@auburn.edu.

This year's reunion had barely ended when I found myself quickly switching gears and winging my way to the west coast on a short business trip. As I changed time zones, I was still reveling in the great times enjoyed at this year's get together. Even better, I was already anticipating the good times to be had next year when the Knights faithful once again make their annual pilgrimage to the Plains. It will be superb!

In closing, our February 2012 AKA Board meeting is not too far around the corner. So, I encourage you to pass any thoughts or suggestions regarding the AKA and/or our reunion to me or any other AKA Officer or Board member (see p. 3). We welcome your input.

Keep Swingin',

Peter Blaise



Order Your DVDs and CDs Today

You can still purchase CDs and DVDs from Procat, the company that recorded every song, solo and soliloquy from the 2011 reunion. Use the order form on the back of this issue of *The Bridge*.

Don't Miss What's on the AKA Website

Visit www.auburnknightsalumni.org to find more news and content than we can fit in *The Bridge*. There are videos of the era bands, pictures from the reunion, alumni news and more.

A Great Brunch of Guys

Special thanks go out to all the musicians for the jazz brunch on Saturday during the 2011 reunion and to John Norton for putting it all together and providing the pianos.

The main players were Richard Garrett and Jack Drescher on bass, Sam Fredericks on drums, and Dave Edmunds and John Conner on sax and John again on his Electronic Wind Instrument.

And thanks to the others who sat in and wowed us with their talents. It is a constant amazement at just how many tremendously skilled musicians come out of the woodwork just to take part in our little get together.

Upcoming Dates

February 11, 2012 - Board Meeting at the Opelika Marriott

July 17-22, 2012 - 82nd Reunion

Those *Other* Summer Knights

The summer of 1937, with its exhilarating tour of the Great Lakes resorts on an MCA circuit alongside the likes of the bands of Count Basie and Sammy Kaye, is well known in AKO lore as a high water mark in the band's pre-war history. Much lesser known, but notable in its own way, was the summer tour of the next year, 1938.

That spring had brought major changes in personnel. The departures of seven seniors, including Gerald Yelverton, Frank Barnard, Charlie Bradley,

and Hilding Holmberg, all for musical careers, made for serious rebuilding. The Knights, guided by a new frontman, pianist Robin Russell, regrouped by adopting a "small" lineup of three reeds, four brass, and a three-piece rhythm section.

The summer started with plenty of promise. A new booking agent, O.R. Walls, lined up a series of engagements in North and South Carolina. The first leg went smoothly. The band played with success at various spots, including the University of South Carolina and Carolina Beach

before striking out for a one-nighter in the mountain town of Morganton, NC. Bobby Adair, then a freshman clarinetist, later recalled that by that point the agent owed the band for two jobs, a total of about \$350, and the Knights had begun to run out of any reserve funds they had.

"When we returned to the bus after spending our last pocket money on lunch, 'Tobe' Griffith, the bass player and business manager,

announced that the whole band had barely enough cash to get us back to Auburn, and he had decided to turn the bus around right then and there.

"We knew we'd be in hot water for not showing up for the dance in Morganton"

-Bobby Adair

"We knew we'd be in hot water for not showing up for the dance in Morganton, and even figured that the host might call the police to find us and force us to play. On the other hand, everyone knew we weren't going to get any money that night, and with no place to stay and no sure prospects, why, nobody could see a good way out of the situation. Finally, Tobe just started the bus and lit out for home, driving as fast as he dared, on back roads with all of us hushed up and nervous and looking over our shoulders. We let out the damndest cheer when we finally crossed into South Carolina, because it meant we'd escaped the law!

"Sure enough, the guy had called the police after about 3 p.m. when we still weren't there, hoping they would stop us and confiscate all our equipment. Then he sued to recover his loss. Of course, the agent was really at fault, and we wouldn't have gotten paid even if we had played. Ed Wadsworth's father, a lawyer, eventually settled the case with the dance host for all of \$25."

Although ultimately just a close call, the incident did serve to bring the Grand Tour of '38 to a screeching halt, and the Knights suddenly found themselves with the remainder of a long, hot summer to woodshed and look forward to the resumption of their regular (paying!) gigs for the fall in Auburn.

The AKAA website has a longer version of this story with more names and details: www.auburnknightsalumni.org.

In Memoriam: Dr. Billy G. Walls

Dr. Billy Walls was the band director at AU from 1969 to 1991. He was a great supporter of the AKO, sat in on occasion as a skilled trombonist and would always let the Knights practice in the AU band room. Many comments can be viewed on the Facebook pages of Dr. Walls and his wife Kim Curley Walls.

Billy "Doc" G. Walls, Auburn University Professor of Music/Director of Bands Emeritus and Music Education Instructor attained perfection September 13, 2011. Born January 28, 1934, Bill was preceded in death by his father Elsie, mother Iva, and brother Joe "Tommy." Survivors include wife Kim Curley Walls, sons Bill and Ed, daughter-in-law Kristen, grandsons Brandon and Austin, and thousands of prior students from Auburn University, University of Texas at San Antonio, Florida State University U.S. Navy School of music, and the Auburn, AL community.

A native of Naples, TX, Bill was a longtime resident of Lake Martin and a member of Red Ridge United Methodist Church in Dadeville, AL, where he enjoyed his four cats, bird watching, yoga, teaching music to elementary education students, visiting classes at Loachapoka Elementary School, and a lifelong passion for the trombone. He held Music Education and Music degrees from Baylor University, Manhattan School of Music, and Florida State University, served in the 4th Army Band at Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio, TX, and performed as a professional trombonist. Dr. Walls was affiliated with Auburn University departments of music and curriculum and teaching for 50 years.

Visitation was 10:00 a.m., Saturday, September 17, 2011, at Red Ridge United Methodist Church in Dadeville, AL, with

the memorial service beginning at 11:00 a.m. The family requests that in lieu of flowers, memorials should be to the Auburn University Foundation, designated for the Billy "Doc" G. Walls Scholarship Fund, and sent to the Auburn University Foundation, Attn.: Theresa Bush at 317 S. College Street, Auburn, AL 36849.



A trombone octet performed during Dr. Walls's service. Pictured are (front row, L-R) Woody Leonard*, Rusty Logan*, David Ranney, Fritz Siler*, (back row) Cecil Wilder*, Paul Harris, Garry Taylor*, & Joe Watson* (*AKAA alumni)

Scholarship Recipients: “Thank you, AKA”

From Charlie Anne Grimes...

Reunion was wonderful this year! I thoroughly enjoyed listening to each era's band! It was an honor to sing for you as well. It is always a little intimidating to realize that I am performing for men and women who have much more experience than me. I consider myself blessed to be able to carry the great tradition of the Auburn Knights Orchestra into its eighty-first year!

I would like to thank you for your decision to grant me a scholarship this year. I cannot begin to express how much my family and I appreciate your generous gift. I will endeavor to excel academically and to represent the Auburn Knights Orchestra well this year. Thank you again, and I look forward to seeing you all at next year's reunion.

From Eric Shaw...

Thank you for the generous scholarship presented to me at this year's reunion. It is an honor both to receive the award and to play with the band. Your gifts undoubtedly will enhance my educational experience at Auburn University. Playing with the Auburn Knights has been nothing but rewarding and I look forward to continued involvement.

From Jimmy Johnson...

I would like to offer my sincerest thanks for awarding me the AKA scholarship this year. Your financial support over the past 5 years (whoa!) has made my academic journey much easier than it may have otherwise been. I'm growing very close to the conclusion of my degree, so hopefully this will be the last time I will have to solicit your support.

As an aside, I had an absolute blast this year at reunion. It warms my heart

every year to take part in the magic of Knights Reunion, and to see how much this organization means not only to myself and current members, but also to members from years past. I hate that I have to wait 11 months to do it all again. Maybe by the time I become an alumnus, the reunion will be held biannually!

Oh, and one last tidbit. Earlier in the summer I contacted the AKA looking for a new saxophone. As of 2 weeks ago, I am the proud owner of a new P. Mauriat System 76 (2nd edition) alto sax. The horn plays like a dream, and even better than my Selmer Serie II. It's like going from driving a Kia to a Cadillac, and I certainly recommend the horn to any sax players out there looking for an upgrade.

Thank you all again for everything!

Marion Evans on Tony Bennett's Duets II

Marion Evans (AKO 1951) has collaborated again with Tony Bennett, arranging for the new album *Duets II*. The project debuted in September 2011 at the number one position on Billboard's top album chart. Visit tonybennett.com for tour dates.

Bass Amps, Combined Bands and More

Thanks to the Board members and the general-membership meeting attendees on July 23, 2011, we now have new board members (see Peter Blaise letter, p. 1) and new scholarship recipients (see thank-yous, this page).

Members made money available for new software to publish *The Bridge*, and identical bass amps will be supplied in both the Lounge and the Ballroom at future reunions.

As is part of the normal cycle of many era bands, leaders of the 1900s and 2000s bands have decided to combine forces for the 2012 reunion.

OUR LEADERS

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Keep Us Swinging! Your dues and scholarship gifts help our alumni group and the current band stay strong. Send dues (\$20/yr.) to Wade Johnson, AKA Treasurer / 4868 Camp Grandview Rd. / Millbrook, AL 36054. Send scholarship gifts to AKA Scholarship Fund / c/o Fritz Siler / 3110 Deer Chase Ct. SW / Snellville, GA 30078.



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