



# The Bridge



*Connecting Members of the Auburn Knights Alumni Association*  
VOL. XV NUMBER I, OCTOBER 2013

## ...A Weekend Not to Miss!



Incredibly, nearly three months have passed since our 2013 reunion. And what a reunion it was! From the nostalgic opening act of the 1940's era band to the grand finale of the current band lighting up the stage with "What is Hip," this year's reunion was a true success. All the bands sounded great thanks to the participation of so many alumni and era band leaders. Thank you to all that came and supported this amazing event.

As most of you know, we recently lost our dear friend and chief Knight, Mr. Charlie Higgins. Charlie was a guiding light for the Knights and his contributions to the success of the AKA and the reunion are beyond words. He was our oldest living member and was involved in every aspect of this great organization from its very beginnings. He will be truly missed.

As president, I saw first-hand the dedicated effort of so many people that make the reunion such a special weekend. With the addition of the Silent Auction and the "Mixer" for alumni to mingle with the current band, the reunion keeps getting better. Add in the amazing Marriott staff's dedicated service and first-class amenities, and the reunion is most definitely a weekend not to miss.

It was a pleasure to see a few faces that have been away from the reunion for a while and to hear the joy in voices as they assured me a return next year. If you haven't made it to the reunion in a while, please come back – we'd love to see you in 2014.

Lastly, Big Band popularity is on the rise in Auburn! The current band had a successful Homecoming swing dance and there are plans for the Valentine's dance in February where the current band and alumni plan to trade-off sets. Don't miss it!

See you soon,  
Tim Baur

**Mark Your Calendars!!!**  
**The 84th Anniversary**  
**Auburn Knights Alumni Association Reunion**  
**July 17-19, 2014**

**In Memoriam**  
**Charlie Higgins**  
**April 15, 1920 - October 1, 2013**



Services celebrating the life of Charlie Higgins were held on Friday, October 4, 2013 at Leak Memory Chapel, Montgomery, Ala.

Charlie was born on April 15, 1920 in Montgomery, AL and went home to be with his wife of 64 years, Celia Higgins, on Tuesday, Oct 1, 2013 at the age of 93 years young, according to his standards.

Charlie had an impact on so many lives and the state of Alabama throughout his life. He attended Auburn University where he was a Theta Chi and member of the Auburn Band. After attending Auburn University, he was head of Procurement at Brookley Air Force Base in Mobile, AL. In 1956, Charlie joined the Easter Seals organization in Montgomery. He would be named President in 1973 and remain in that position until his retirement in 1986. You can't speak of Easter Seals in Alabama without mentioning Charlie Higgins at the same time. He was one of the primary individuals responsible for building the fantastic network of Easter Seals facilities that served individuals with disabilities from Huntsville to Mobile. He played a major role in the development and fund raising of one of his proudest accomplishments, Camp ASCCA, a camp for individuals with disabilities so they too could (see Charlie, Page 2)

**Charlie** (continued from Page 1)

participate in a variety of outdoor recreation opportunities. He continued to serve on the board until his passing.

Charlie was an active member of several organizations, but his true passion was playing his trumpet. He was the oldest living member of the Auburn Knights Alumni Association (AKAA). Every year at the Auburn Knights reunion, the one thing everyone couldn't wait to see and hear was Charlie playing "Sugar Blues." He was a longtime AKAA reunion coordinator and was also a past President of the association. Charlie was a Shriner belonging to the Alcazar Shrine Temple. He served many posts with the Shriners and played in The Shrine Band which performed all over the South. Charlie was also a member of the Royal Order of Jesters serving in many different areas including the "Director of the Book of Play." He was a member of the Montgomery Rotary Club, also serving as a past President. One of his biggest accomplishments and things he was most proud of was his perfect attendance for 46 years. He loved going to his meetings and getting to visit with everyone, all of whom were honored to sit at "Charlie's Table."

He was always the one to truly give you the shirt off his back, never met a stranger, loved the Lord, his family, and his country, and truly loved his Auburn Tigers and playing his trumpet.

Charlie was preceded in death by his wife of 64 years, Celia Higgins, and his parents.

He is survived by his daughter, Linda Bozeman, and husband Larry, his grandson Clay Fowler and his wife Dawn and daughter, Isabella; and his grandson Greg Fowler and his two sons, Waylon Moon and Wyatt Fox.

Pall Bearers were Clay Fowler, Greg Fowler, Mike Lyle, Barry Cavan, Gene Mosley, John Stevenson, Donnie Newton, Nat Michelson, and Ryan Chapman.

Honorary pall bearers were Earl Heath, Auburn Knights Alumni Association, Camp ASCCA, Montgomery Rotary Club, Alcazar Shrine Temple, Royal Order of Jesters, and the Easter Seals of Alabama.

## June 17, 2014 will be the final day to book a room for the 2014 Auburn Knights Reunion at the Marriott group rate of \$95/night. Don't wait!

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Group rates for the 2014 Auburn Knights Reunion will be valid beginning Wednesday, 7/16/14 (for those arriving early) through Sunday, 7/20/14. Era Band rehearsals will begin Thursday, 7/17/14.

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To reserve rooms by phone, call (334) 741-9292 (Reservations) or (334) 737-2130 (Karen Gilmore, Event Coordinator, Auburn Marriott Opelika Hotel and Conference Center).

For suites (a limited number are available), please be aware the costs for suites during the 2014 reunion will be higher than the regular Marriott room rate. For next year's reunion, suite rates will be:

Junior Suite: \$115/night (Living/Sitting Area, King Bed, Balcony)

Executive Kitchen: \$135/night (Kitchen, King Bed)

Executive Suite: \$155/night (King Bed, Sofabed, Living/Sitting Area, Balcony)



## The Current Band Has Been Busy!

The AKO has enjoyed an exciting Fall semester with several gigs already under their belt. On October 4th, the band played the 10-year birthday party of the Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Arts, already an Auburn landmark. The following week, the band played an October 12th Homecoming Dance which also featured an AKAA alumni combo.

The band has also been holding auditions to fill out vacant chairs. So far, new players include a new bass trombone player and a new trumpet player. Trombone auditions will continue over the next few weeks. However, the band still has a vacancy on piano. Know any good piano players?

The band is once again in the hunt for a somewhat permanent rehearsal space as their use of the student center for rehearsals has come to an end. They are temporarily rehearsing in the Goodwin Music Building as they continue to search for other accommodations.

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## From the Editor: Echoes

In the 83 years since the founding of the Auburn Knights Orchestra, it's only natural that our Knights family has experienced the loss of fellow musicians and close friends along the way as time has taken its toll. After all, the cycle of life does have its beginning and its inevitable end. Nevertheless, we can't help but grieve for our old friends when they leave us. At every Knights reunion, we honor their legacy with each note we play.

Like many in the Auburn Knights family, the news of Charlie Higgins passing earlier this month hit me like a ton of bricks. I had known him for almost forty years of my life and as I had become more involved with the AKAAs, I relished his sage advice, his incredible wisdom, his humor, and most importantly, his friendship. When I started serving as AKAAs President in 2010, Charlie's wise counsel was frequently given and always appreciated. Charlie's humility was legendary; even so, I often told him he was my hero. No exaggeration on my part. I meant it!

On the day of Charlie's funeral, I was on my way to Montgomery, barely listening to the radio when a familiar tune caught my ear. The song was *Echoes* by the singer/songwriter Dar Williams. Consider the first two verses:

*Every time you love just a little  
Take one step closer, solving a riddle  
It echoes all over the world*

*Every time you opt in to kindness  
Make a connection, used to divide us  
It echoes all over the world*

That, to me, was the essence of Charlie. A kind and gentle man with great love for his family, friends, Auburn University, the Auburn Knights, and, as Charlie would often say, "so on and so forth." He connected with all of us. Most importantly, I can say without a doubt that for me, his subtle lessons on life will continue to echo...all over the world! In a greater sense, the essence of all of our departed Knights will continue to echo in each of us.

- Peter Blaise

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## Silent Auction Grows in Second Year!

After a modest beginning in 2012, our Silent Auction to benefit the AKAAs Scholarship Fund was bigger and better this year, raising over \$2,800! A total of 35 items were donated by 29 merchants and individuals, including several AKAAs members. These ranged from gift certificates to Auburn apparel & artwork to tailgate baskets and even musical instruments. Of special interest were some beautiful pieces of original art and custom jewelry by AKAAs family and friends.

Bidder participation was much greater this year, with more than 40 people registered and no items leftover. The display and bidding process were also improved, thanks to the great work by Judy Bailey, who tirelessly "manned" the Silent Auction room near the Registration Table!

Some of you who have participated in other silent auctions are probably thinking, "\$2,800, is that all?" and that's why we need your help to grow this event even more next year. Fritz Siler and John Norton visited over 50 Auburn-Opelika businesses in May and June, but a few iconic local merchants didn't respond even after multiple visits and contacts. If you have a close relationship with any local businesses, please let us know.

The other way you can participate is by donating items yourself or soliciting merchants or individuals in your area. Of course, you can always help by making a significant contribution to the AKAAs Scholarship Fund!

### Remembrances

*It's impossible to remember Charlie Higgins in just a few words because I have a lifetime of wonderful memories with him and the Auburn Knights. In recent years, however, I came to think of Charlie as an inspiration because of the way he continued to live life to the fullest and remain an active and very capable musician. And if any man ever embodied the Auburn Creed, it was Charlie Higgins! (John Norton)*

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## Highlights From the Summer 2013 AKAAs Board and General Membership Meetings

- Tim Baur succeeded Dave Edmunds as President. Unfortunately, health issues forced Dave to resign from the AKAAs Board.
- President Tim Baur called the meeting to order at 8:30 AM. In attendance were Nat Michelson, Bob Jemian, Dave Edmunds, Paul McCracken, Tim Baur, Joe Watson, Fritz Siler, Wade Johnson, Woody Leonard, Chris Rose, John Conner, Richard Garrett, Ralph Black, Patrick McCurry, Charlie Higgins, Cathy Altonji, Bob Greenhaw, Rob Cothran, Andy Duke, Peter Blaise, and Ryan Chapman.
- After eight years of service, Nat Michelson "retired" as AKAAs Secretary.
- Elected to fill the 2014-16 Board positions were Hank Elliott ('50s), Cecil Wilder ('60s), Jana Calano (2000s), Phil Gipson ('80s), and Reid Gavin ('90s-2000s). Woody Leonard was elected to fill Tim Baur's vacant Vice President position; Nat Michelson was elected to fill the vacancy created by Woody's move to VP; Sonny Mayfield was elected to fill the vacant 2012-2014 Board position resulting from Jack Dresher's resignation; and Peter Blaise was elected Secretary.
- Wade Johnson, Treasurer, reported a healthy checking account balance of \$15,901.15 (as of 7/20/13); expenses for the previous five months totaled \$1,700.13.
- Patrick McCurry resigned as editor of the "The Bridge." Peter Blaise agreed to take over.

(See Board Highlights, Page 4)

## AKAA Awards Three Scholarships

During the current band's set at this year's reunion, the AKAA announced a total of three \$1000 scholarships to be given to current AKO band members. Recipients for the coming academic year were Charlie Anne Grimes, Dustin Saunders, and Ryan Blackwell. Congratulations!!!

Many thanks to those who have so generously contributed to the AKAA Scholarship Fund at the reunion and in the days surrounding our special gathering. Total contributions (not counting the silent auction) were \$3,704. This is truly wonderful! Even better, a new benchmark in generosity was set by one donor with the single contribution of \$2,000. Without a doubt, we've all been challenged to dig a little deeper into our pockets! We all know the cost of higher education has risen so your charitable gifts are extremely important to these deserving students.

John Norton and Fritz Siler would like to encourage all of you to participate in supporting the scholarship fund. It makes our journeys to the businesses for the silent auction all the easier.

### Board Highlights (continued from Page 3)

- The Board voted to amend the scholarship fund rules to permit 50% of annual donations be given out as scholarships with the remaining 50% to the scholarship account corpus (the goal is a corpus of \$100,000). Previously, the by-laws stated 25% of donations were to go to scholarships with the other 75% to the corpus. The Board also voted to award three \$1,000 scholarships for 2013.
- AKAA Library: The index of charts is migrating to MS Access relational database; about half of library's 2,400 hard copy charts have been scanned for electronic filing.
- Silent Auction: John Norton & Fritz Siler called on many local merchants and received 35 items for this year's silent auction. Ensuing discussion emphasized the need to promote the auction during the jazz brunch and reunion performances.
- Archives: Fritz Siler reported that he is attempting to get visitors to the Archives room to identify names of people in photos; Bob Greenhaw has crafted a 45-minute AKO history presentation that should be seen by all; Fritz has the CDs compiled and edited by the late Jef Thurman and will place them in the AU library.
- AKO Board of Directors: John Norton reported per AKO Board bylaws, it's time for officers to be rotated/appointed with AKO business manager being a permanent position.
- Reunion Coordinator: Charlie Higgins reviewed the new contract rates for the 2013 reunion and the room reservation process. He also explained that the Marriott has been losing money on the midnight breakfast buffet and, as a result of last minute negotiations, the Friday night breakfast buffet was cancelled.
- Publicity: AKAA reunion press releases went out to 67 southeastern newspapers.

## Remembrances

*When I was Business Manager for the current band in the early 2000s, I met Charlie Higgins and almost immediately, Charlie immersed me in the business and history of the band and assured me that he would help me keep up the excellent tradition that had been cultivated over the long history of the AKO. Charlie was an impeccable reader of people. He knew just what to say and how to encourage the person he was speaking to. I still have his phone number memorized because of the numerous times I called him seeking advice and guidance from everything under the sun. I also knew to make sure to have a pen and paper ready because Charlie always had some to-do items for me!*

*My fondest memory of Charlie was the Reunion just after Ms. Celia passed away. He asked me to sit next to him on the 4th book for his 30's band performance because it was the first time he had played since her passing and was not sure if he could manage to play all of the tunes. Of course his playing was flawless and although you could tell he missed her more than words could say, he said he knew she was there in the audience watching. It was a beautiful moment I will never forget. Thank you, Charlie... for everything. (Jana Calano)*

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*Charlie—We are shocked and deeply saddened learning that your horn is forever silenced. Everyone knew you, and you knew everybody. You are a legend, and you remain an inspiration to us 'younger' guys to 'keep on blowin' '. Each year you played an important role in Knights affairs, as well as keeping the '30s Band prominent and viable. The music of the '30s was your passion, but you loved all good music. All this is a full plate for anyone, but you kept your activities and your family and friends balanced. Of course, the Auburn Knights 'family' was key in your life. Charlie, you are a gentleman, a true Southerner, and a real American. We love you, we miss you, and Charlie, wherever you are, keep on blowin' '. (J.H. Owen)*

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*Charlie was kind and full of wisdom. Rarely was he not concerned with someone else's well being and happiness. Those qualities affected his leadership. I think we followed what he said because we knew that if Charlie Higgins said it, it was a good idea and had everyone's best interest at heart. (Patrick McCurry)*

## Grace Notes

**Bebe Butler Morgan Abner:** An AKAA Honorary member, Bebe passed away July 9, 2013 at the age of 70. Bebe owned and operated Hoover Florist since 1981 with her daughter Karen Morgan Jenkins and was a member of North Central Alabama Floral Association.

**Carl C. Fowler, Jr.:** An AKAA Associate member, Carl passed away February 12, 2013 at the age of 91. A retired electrical engineer, Carl began playing the trumpet in high school. He was a founding member of the "Atlanta 17" big band and also played in several other Atlanta area bands and combos.

**Bruce H. McLain, Sr.:** A former Auburn Knight, Bruce passed away April 12, 2013 at the age of 84. Bruce was active in Nashville business and engineering circles and retired as President and CEO of the company he founded, Air Control Industries.

## The Beginning

The Auburn Knights Orchestra was founded in the early fall of 1930 at a time when the United States was in the throes of the Great Depression. Pluto, then considered a planet, had just been discovered and, far from Auburn, the German National Socialist Party led by one Adolf Hitler was beginning its rise to power. Prohibition would not be repealed for three more years, and the exciting new sounds of hot jazz were relegated to illegal, big-city nightclubs known as “speakeasies.” For most people, radio was king in the world of entertainment and live broadcasts by sweet-sounding orchestras such as those led by Paul Whiteman and Guy Lombardo helped popularize new ballroom dance numbers like “Stardust” and “(I’m) Confessin’ That I Love You.”

Like many other small towns throughout the rural South, Auburn had only a few homes with telephones and a handful of paved blocks among its dozen or so principal streets. Life in the town of almost 3,000 residents revolved around home, church, work, and the activities at the Alabama Polytechnic Institute, the local land-grant institution with a co-ed student population of about 2,000. The upcoming decade appeared to hold little promise for the school popularly known either as API or more simply, “Auburn.” Its financial support from the state was eroding and the administration and faculty were still recovering from the divisive resignation of an unpopular college president in 1928. The college’s athletic programs, always a source of pride for the community, had been in a tailspin since the 1923 departure of football coach Mike Donahue. However, one bright spot in 1930 was the donation of a young golden eagle as a mascot and living embodiment of the long-established school cheer, “War Eagle!”

Charles “Red” Blackledge graduated from Sidney Lanier High School in Montgomery in the spring of 1930 and in September of that year, he traveled the 55 miles to Auburn by train to begin his college career. Red earned a scholarship to play trombone in the API marching band and soon met some of the upper-class musicians on campus. One outstanding sax player, James E. “Jimmie” Robbins, a junior from Selma, was looking to organize a new dance orchestra and Blackledge was soon recruited. As he later recalled, “Otho Robinson, a tuba player that everybody called ‘Goof,’ showed up at my boarding house one day driving an old car that looked a little like the vehicle the astronauts drove on the moon, and said, ‘get in, we’re going to a band meeting.’ I didn’t have any idea what was going on, but I went along and as it turned out, it was just my good fortune to get in on the ground floor with the Auburn Knights.”

The orchestra was organized that September in a series of meetings held in the Music Building, an old wood frame structure facing Thach Avenue in an area that is now part of the grounds of Ralph B. Draughon Library. Jimmie Robbins was elected leader, and J.R. Quinlivan, a tenor sax player from Mobile, was elected business manager. As Robbins remembered it, a number of band names were discussed, but “among those suggested, ‘Auburn Knights’ seemed to have had the greatest appeal because of the triple connotation: 1) Auburn-ite, a booster of Auburn; 2) Auburn-night, a participant in Auburn night-life; and 3) Auburn Knight, a defender of Auburn.” [Kyle Mann, an AKO saxophonist in the early ‘80s, noted in her article on the Knights for *The Auburn University Band: A Centennial History* that the choice of such a chivalrous-sounding name was completely in step with musical fashions in the early ‘30s. “It was during this romantic age that orchestras, both on and off college campuses, were adopting such royal names as *Cavaliers*, *Kingsmen* and *Royal Music Makers*. Also, orchestra leaders were adopting nicknames like *Earl* and *Count*.”]

From the beginning, Robbins and his fellow Knights worked to establish high musical and professional standards. The previous school year had marked an uncreative period for dance bands on the API campus and the Knights were determined to set a new benchmark. According to Red Blackledge, the first step they took to overcome the stigma that surrounded local student music groups was to hire the very best possible musicians, and only those who showed maturity and responsibility in everyday affairs. Each had to agree to stick with the band for the full school term whether dance jobs were forthcoming or not. Ten young men were invited to attend the first meeting, and all ten formed the collective that became the Auburn Knights. Although the agreement to organize was entirely verbal, the original ten stayed together throughout the entire school year and successfully laid the foundation upon which the Knights would build for many years to come.

### Did You Forget to Order Your 2013 Reunion CDs/DVDs?

Not to Worry! You can still order from ProCAT Audio Video Productions at “[www.allabouttheband.com](http://www.allabouttheband.com).”

Go to the ProCat website, scroll down to “Past Events,” then click on the link to the 2013 Auburn Knights Reunion. Fill out the online ordering form, then follow the checkout instructions. If you have any questions, call ProCAT at 1-800-879-4228 or (205) 668-1122



Auburn Knights Alumni Association  
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**The 2014 AKA Reunion  
July 17-19, 2014**

**The Auburn Knights Alumni Association**

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**BOARD MEMBERS**

2011 - 2014 Ralph Black Jr. | Andy Duke | Nat Michelson | John Norton | Sonny Mayfield  
2012 - 2015 Cathy Bell Altonji | Ryan Chapman | Rob Cothran | Bob Greenhaw | Tony McCutcheon  
2013 - 2015 Jana Calano | Cecil Wilder | Hank Elliott | Phil Gipson, Jr. | Reid Gavin

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