

The Echoes

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The St. Albert Historical Society

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Notice of Annual General Meeting

You are invited to attend the Annual General Meeting of the

St. Albert Historical Society

Saturday March 19

***** 11:00 A.M. *****

at

The St. Albert Train Station

Mission Avenue and Meadowview Drive, St. Albert

for the purpose of hearing reports and the election of Directors

Come for Lunch

**** A Light Lunch Will Be Served After the AGM ****

A Bridge Over Time

The Continuing Story of St. Albert

Committee Progress

The Book Committee has made considerable progress in the areas of research and gathering submissions for our new book on St. Albert's history; however, much still needs to be accomplished to prepare the document for the printers. The main task now is to format all of the information in the required form and the Committee would love to have a few more persons available.

Volunteers, Please

If you are able to help – especially in the areas of word processing and formatting but also in other areas – please contact Lynne Duigou, at 780-458-6640, 780-446-9150 or by email at stalberthistoryupdate@gmail.com.

Deadline Extended - Search for a Cover Design

The book committee has extended the deadline for submissions for a cover design for *A Bridge Over Time* to April 15, 2016. Please see the enclosed poster for details. The contest is open to all, not only members of the Society.

Comprehensive Historical Reference

A Bridge Over Time will contain all the historical information contained in the original *Black Robe's Vision* – less the family stories – as well as the developments in St. Albert from 1985 to the present day. As a result the new publication, like *The Black Robe's*, will be a comprehensive reference on the history of St. Albert.

Looking Back

Some months ago Arlene Borgstede, in one of her *Looking Back* articles, made reference to “PITCH and SPICE, a very large teenaged choir (who) sang and played exuberantly.” We have asked a former member to recount the group's history and the influence it had on the youth of the community. Enjoy!

PITCH and SPICE

St. Albert's own “Duck Dynasty”

By Monte Gannon

PITCH (People In The Crowd Harmonists) and SPICE (Spreading Peace In Crowds Everywhere) were two large choirs (totaling at one time over 260 members) that evolved from “Senior Choir” and “Junior Choir” led by Father Ubald Duchesneau, OMI, during the late 1960's and the 1970's. The two choirs had started as music ministry groups at school and parish liturgies. The “folk mass” drew many young people and their parents to Church because of the musical style and expression.

PITCH and SPICE were two of the many groups that Father Duchesneau started and supervised in St. Albert that involved thousands of youth and community members during the years of operation. From his position at St Albert Catholic Parish and his teaching post at St Albert High School, Father Duchesneau had a unique ability to engage youth in community activities that gave back to the community. By using music as a “draw”, PITCH and SPICE grew with singers, musicians, equipment crew, parent advisors, and community members.

PITCH and SPICE performed within St. Albert and travelled to other communities in Alberta such as St. Paul, Grande Prairie and Vermilion. In the ‘70’s, the travel went further around North America including Quebec, Saskatchewan, British Columbia and the United States, including Alaska and the Spokane World’s Fair. In most cases the members were billeted in homes in the hosting communities or in local schools. Participants had to be part of the fundraising activities which funded the trips.

The groups were the background chorus to the Privilege production of *Jesus Christ Superstar* and performed with them at the Edmonton and Calgary Jubilee Auditoriums. Following this, PITCH and SPICE performed *Jesus Christ Superstar* as their own production and recorded an album of the rock opera. An annual Jubilee Auditorium performance became a recurring event. Father Duchesneau also created his own rock opera, *Spellbound*, compiled from contemporary songs, including several from the rock opera *Godspell*. *Spellbound* followed the very successful run of *Jesus Christ Superstar*. In 1971 Father Duchesneau was recognized as the St. Albert Citizen of the Year, joining other recipients like the Hon. Lois Hole in this honour.

What was especially unique about PITCH and SPICE was that anyone could belong as long as they attended the practices and followed the rules. Being a great vocalist was not a prerequisite to being part of the group. Those who could not carry a tune could still participate, if not as a vocalist then as a musician, equipment crew, audiovisual person or in a variety of other capacities. Father Duchesneau fostered the potential of thousands of youth in St Albert. His approach to engaging youth included the development of leadership abilities and occupied much of the out-of-school time that young people might have used for less positive pastimes and pursuits. The use of drugs or alcohol was grounds for being dismissed from the groups. PITCH and SPICE along with the Movers youth club (which included the Youth Center committee, Holiday Community Volunteers, and the Social, Economic, and Cultural committee) were the dominant youth activities for many St Albert junior and senior high students along with their parents and the community at large. Community members could act as chaperones or on the advisory committee or help with the music. Frances Schuchard and Louise Lukay were two of the local music teachers who assisted with voice lessons and with developing harmonies. Through the years there were many others but these two stand out as longtime supporters. Several parents, like Adrian Telford, took on many tasks to facilitate the groups’ activities and trips and acted as surrogate parents to many of the young people during the travels.

The results of Father Duchesneau’s impact on the youth and the community cannot be overstated. Long after high school the graduates of these groups continue to contribute to the community of St Albert, and beyond, in many ways. Many of the graduates of PITCH and SPICE and the Movers youth groups are still active community leaders in a variety of ways including volunteerism, municipal councils, school trustees and business groups as well as church and service clubs. Several musical groups arose from their participation in the choirs and some lifelong friendships had their beginnings in these innovative and engaging groups. Father Duchesneau was affectionately called “Father Duck” due to his name and his ducktail hair style. Being active in Father Duck’s groups guaranteed almost a full time commitment to community service and contribution. PITCH and SPICE are a model for youth involvement and community contribution. St. Albert’s “DUCK DYNASTY” is one to be proud of.