

Roots in Ripon

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Chuck Roots

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A Capital Idea

This past weekend, Isaura and I drove to Sacramento. Specifically, the McClellan Conference Center located on the site of what once was McClellan Air Force Base, slightly northeast of California's capital city. The reason for this junket centers around one of my hobbies. Namely, singing barbershop music.

This hobby has been great fun for the past 30 years, beginning when I was stationed at the former Naval Communications Station in Stockton, California. I had wanted to get involved years earlier, but due to moving around in the military it just wasn't feasible. Once in Stockton, I connected with the Stockton Portsman, singing with them for the two-and-a-half years I was stationed there. I wanted to continue, but again, due to military transfers (Post-Graduate Studies followed by a tour in Rota, Spain) my desire to continue in this classic American display of four-part harmony was delayed till another day.

After I left active duty in 1993, we settled in Turlock, where I again ran into some barbershop buddies from day's past, who told me they were forming a new chapter, to be named the Golden Valley Chorus (GVC). GVC officially began in 1997 where I once again reveled in the barbershop sound. Then 9/11 happened. In 2002 I said goodbye to my singing buddies, as I had been called up to serve in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). When I returned two years later, I needed to reestablish myself with my church congregation as their pastor, plus, my naval reserve responsibilities were much greater in a war-time setting, leaving me with no extra time for my hobby.

Finally, in 2011 after having retired from the military a few years earlier, I felt I had the time once again to engage in my pastime. I rejoined the Golden Valley Chorus in Modesto, reuniting with many old friends. And just last September I joined another chorus in Sacramento, the Voices of California, VoCal for short.

Our weekend was all about choruses and quartets competing against each other to hopefully win their district or division. As it turns out, GVC (with 18 singers on stage) won two awards. We are the new Plateau "A" Champions; and we were judged to be the "Most Improved Chorus." VoCal (with 65 singers), was crowned the Northeast Division Champs, and Plateau "AAA" Champions. VoCal will be heading for Las Vegas in early July to compete in the 2017 International in search of the coveted prize of being crowned the best chorus in the world. How grateful I am to be associated with such an organization as the Barbershop Harmony Society (Old Timers will remember this as SPEBSQSA, the Society for the Preservation and Encouragement of Barbershop Quartet Singing in America).

So, as Isaura and I were heading out of Sacramento late Sunday morning, we decided to drive through our state capital. It was a beautiful Spring day, calling to us like the sirens of lore. We drove to the Capitol building where we parked a block away, walking around the entire Capitol grounds of the beautiful building

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where California's elected representatives meet. The Capitol sits on 37 acres, officially opening as California's Capitol in 1874. Originally, the state capital was shuffled back-and-forth to San Francisco due to flooding in the delta region of Sacramento. The Capitol itself features "a portico opening into a central rotunda that rises into a dome." It is stunning from both outside and in. Isaura reminded me that as a new immigrant from Portugal, her 8th grade class had a field trip to the capital and its Capitol in 1967. She was impressed, but only a handful of years later, the Capitol would be torn down and rebuilt into the majestic edifice it is today. The "Capitol is ornamented with a gold-plated copper ball reminiscent of California's Gold Rush history." Today's Capitol is an admixture of Palladian, Greek Revival, and Neoclassical architecture.

As awesome as the Capitol is, it was the amazing array of trees and bushes that grace the grounds surrounding the Capitol that drew my wife's total attention. She loves gardening, particularly flowers, so we wandered through the various samples of flora and fauna offered on the grounds. All the azaleas and camellias were blooming which created quite an appearance. Isaura oohed and aahed like a little girl, moving from one festooned tree to another. I had my cell phone camera, so I was busy snapping pictures of her reverie.

We finished off our meandering around the Capitol in front of the entrance. Looking up and seeing the golden dome with the California State flag beneath the flag of the United States rustling in the breeze was a great way to end the day. Several people were taking pictures of this magnificent building. After taking Isaura's picture in front of the building, a young man offered to take our picture, which turned out beautifully.

You may have noticed that I used the words "capital" and "Capitol" throughout. As a reminder from our English language, capital refers to the city or geographic location of a state or territory. On the other hand, Capitol (most always capitalized) refers to the building representing the seat of government for a state or country.

It was a couple of hours well spent. And since it was Sunday, parking on the street was free!

What started out as a Capital Idea, turned out to be a Capitol Idea!