

In the Spotlight

By Elizabeth Geli



© 2013 Taylor Norton.
All rights reserved.

Greater Harrisburg Chorus

When someone says “barbershop singing,” you may be picturing four men in straw hats and striped vests ... but think again.

Twenty years ago, Maggie Ryan was a sports headline writer who had always wanted to sing with other women but didn't think she could on account of her deep voice.

“I'm actually kind of a cool poster child for women who want to get out and sing but aren't sure where to start,” Ryan says. “I never sang anywhere until I joined. I had a friend who kept saying, ‘You've got to try it!’”

Thanks to her persistent friend, Ryan learned that her voice would work well with the unique arrangements in barbershop singing, and she allowed herself to be dragged to a rehearsal of the Greater Harrisburg (Pa.) Chorus. Upon arrival, the choir members stuck her right in the

middle of the group and just had her listen as they began to sing.

“I had never stood inside music before,” Ryan says. “Having music being made and literally physically coming through me for the first time, I thought ‘Well that's it, I have to be here for the rest of my life. I have to do this forever.’ And I have, ever since.”

Best-Kept Secret

The Greater Harrisburg Chorus is a group of 65 energetic women who really know how to rock a four-part harmony and are constantly debunking the barbershop myth of four elderly men in straw hats and striped vests. And they are not alone. Greater Harrisburg

is a member group of Sweet Adelines International, an organization and competitive circuit for female barbershop music consisting of more than 500 choruses and 1,200 quartets across four continents.

At 57 years old, Greater Harrisburg is one of the longest-running and more storied groups in the 68-year-old Sweet Adelines organization. Yet despite Greater Harrisburg's long history, it still frequently shocks audiences with its exuberant modern performances. According to Ryan, the misconception is part of the fun.

“One of the things I pride myself on is that we continually surprise people with the quality of our performance,” says Ryan, who recently ended her term